

Gospel of Matthew

Commentary 2021-2023

by

Mike Kines

Chapter 1

Why is this list of ancestry included in the gospel of Matthew? One reason for this genealogy of the Lord Jesus was to demonstrate that the Lord Jesus was the son of David. This list aids in providing evidence that the Lord Jesus fulfilled the prophecies that the Messiah is the Son of David.

People knew that when the Messiah came he would be the Son of David. The Lord Jesus asked a question of the religious leaders to point this fact out to them. In Mark 12:35-37 the "*Son of David*" is a title of the Messiah and the fulfillment of the promise which God gave to David. God promised David that he would have a son who would sit on his throne forever.

2 Samuel 7:14-16, *"I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."*

Psalms chapter 2 further established this promise and prophecy of God's Son who made the rulers of the nations a footstool for his feet. We still wait for the Lord Jesus to return in this manner and set up his kingdom on earth. This will be fulfilled during the millennial reign of Christ after his second return.

His first appearance on earth was when he came as the lowly servant who died on the cross. His next return will be as a conquering king who puts down all of his enemies and establishes his kingdom on the earth.

Isaiah 9:6-7, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."*

He will rule all the nations of the earth from his capital in Jerusalem. This is a clue as to why Israel and Jerusalem is constantly argued and fought over in the Middle East.

Another point of interest in this genealogy is the mention of notorious women who did not come from a Jewish background but were instead Gentiles grafted into the ancestry of the Lord Jesus.

Among these are Ruth the Moabitess, Tamar, and Rahab. I believe that these are mentioned, not only because they are literal ancestors of Jesus, but also because we see the Lord identifying himself fully with sinful humanity, even in his ancestry.

The Lord Jesus did not have an earthly father. He was born of the virgin Mary. Joseph, his adopted, legal father, did not have sexual relations with his wife Mary until after the Lord Jesus was born. This is clearly outlined in scripture so there is no point in debating whether or not Mary really was a virgin.

Joseph was a godly man and when he found out Mary was pregnant he was ready to divorce her quietly.

This might sound harsh from the perspective of today's corrupt cultural worldview but in those days he was actually doing her a favor by keeping this quiet.

It was a crushing blow to him to find out his bride was pregnant before they were married. However, the Lord explained this to Joseph by sending an angel who communicated with him in a dream.

The angel tells him that the baby conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit and is not a baby conceived in adultery or fornication. This baby was given to Mary by God in a miraculous way.

This miracle birth is foreshadowed in scripture in the account of Sarah and Abraham. She conceived Isaac when she was way too old to have children. Abraham and Sarah were past the age where they could physically have children but God gave them Isaac. God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and Sarah.

In a similar way God gave Mary the baby Jesus with no intervention from a human male. It is interesting that the prophecy about the virgin birth mentions the Messiah would come from the "seed of the woman". Women do not have seed, obviously, but the Messiah was born from a virgin woman. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Notice the angel messenger told Joseph the name to give the baby and also told him the baby would fulfill prophecy in scripture.

The prophecy quoted in verse 23 mentions "Emmanuel", which means "God with us". In this way, we understand the Lord Jesus was not just a baby in a manger but he was and is God.

God is three in one. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is very important to understand this because this is the true God. Any religion which denies the Three In One are promoting a false god.

God is one. There is only one God. This one God is also three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is three in one.

I understand, also, the roles of prophet, priest, king, and also Israel, church, and the nations reflect the three in one nature of God.

Joseph obeyed the instructions the angel gave him in the dream. He took Mary to be his wife in obedience to the Lord, and when the child was born he gave him the name Jesus.

Chapter 2

The shepherds went directly to see the baby Jesus in a manger, but these wise men who followed a star took a side road towards Jerusalem. Perhaps they reckoned in their thoughts a king would surely be born in Jerusalem since he was the king of the Jews. Here we see a contrast in the thinking of men and the thoughts of God. God's thoughts are higher and much different than man's thoughts.

1 Corinthians 1:25, *"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*

We see here God is wiser than wise men and he is stronger than the strength of King Herod the "Great".

These wise men inquire of the pagan, cruel king the whereabouts of the King of the Jews. Herod interpreted this inquiry as a threat against himself. This is not the response of insanity but the response of someone soaked with the values of the world system.

The world system promotes power, position, prestige. These qualities defined the life of this King Herod and he responded to any competition with vicious brutality. Beware when you meet people who aspire to position in life and who are competitive.

When I look at Herod I see the result of this world system attitude and mindset. This mindset and attitude seeks to murder the Lord Jesus because he is a threat to his power and position.

They cannot kill the Lord Jesus now so they apply this hatred towards those who belong to him and are born of the Spirit.

The man seeking a name for himself through position and prestige naturally stomps on the head of the man who is filled with the Holy Spirit. This is how it has always been since Cain and Abel.

When Herod heard news of this King of the Jews he summoned the Jewish religious leaders to share their insight. They were correct in pointing to Bethlehem of Judea as the place where the Messiah would be born.

It does not seem they had any interest or did not believe the prophecy was actually fulfilled at that moment. They gave Herod bible information but that is all it was to them. Just some bible knowledge.

How many times do we today treat bible prophecy of the second coming of Christ in the same manner? Is it possible the second coming of Christ could take place in our life time? Should we not earnestly look for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the rapture of the church? This is our blessed hope and we should search the scriptures daily to discern the time in which we live.

The religious leaders had knowledge but were comfortable in their position and prestige. They were indifferent, or unbelieving, because this news did not excite them like it did the wise men from the east

or King Herod. They were lukewarm and indeed Christ Jesus did spew them out of his mouth when he upbraided their hypocrisy and covetousness.

After the wise men found Jesus, gave him gifts, and worshiped him, they departed back to their own lands using another route to avoid Herod. These men were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod.

We often see this method employed by angels and God to communicate with men throughout scripture from the time of Abraham and Joseph in Genesis and throughout the New Testament gospels and church history in the book Acts.

Not only did God communicate with these wise men but he continuously gave direction to Joseph through dreams and angel visits.

The Lord sent Joseph to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. The angel of the Lord warned Joseph in the dream that Herod would attempt to destroy the young child Jesus.

The apostle Matthew in writing this gospel sees the return of Jesus out of Egypt as fulfillment of prophecy.

Throughout the life of Jesus described in the gospels we see the writer moved by the Holy Spirit to point out how the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus fulfilled prophecy in scripture.

We should note this and study scripture for prophecy concerning his second return in the future. Jesus himself said he is returning again to receive us unto himself that where he is we may be also. (John 14:3)

Another fulfillment of scripture was when Herod killed all the male children under two years of age in Bethlehem. He was enraged the wise men outwitted him, and decided if he could not find the child he would instead kill all the children about the same age.

The Lord knew about this and sent Joseph to Egypt. God knows what the enemy will do before the enemy knows what he will do. God prepares his children and makes a way of escape, as he has promised. (Psalm 91)

Once again Joseph receives instructions from an angel through a dream to return to Israel, but to stay away from the area around Jerusalem and instead live in Nazareth.

It is significant Jesus was raised in the town of Nazareth. Nazareth was a place where poor people lived, and was humble circumstances for the Savior to grow up in. There were more Gentiles in that area than around Jerusalem, and no doubt Jesus came in contact with many people growing up who were not Jews.

Also, later during the ministry of Jesus and even to this day the enemies of Jesus make a big deal about Jesus being a Nazarene. This is for the purpose of casting an insult at the Lord but the Lord himself takes this as a badge of honor. When he spoke to Saul on the road to Damascus he identified himself as

Jesus of Nazareth. **Acts 22:8**, *"And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."*

In world news the murderers of Christians in the middle east make a mark on the house of Christians which means "Nazarene". Even to this day those who persecute the Lord Jesus refer to him as Jesus of Nazareth.

This is meant as an insult but the Lord takes this insult and turns it into a blessing. We are blessed to be identified with this lowly savior who was raised in Nazareth.

He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and he will return again. He will reign as King from his capital in Jerusalem and every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:10-11)

Chapter 3

John's message was repentance and a change in behavior. The people who heard John were religious people, but the Holy Spirit still convicted them of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

As a sign of repentance and humility they allowed John to baptize them in the water of the Jordan River.

John fulfilled the prophecy foretold in Isaiah describing a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. This was John's mission: to get people ready to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This message of repentance is important in preparing hearts to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Until we forsake our opinions it is doubtful we can truly put our entire faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This message of repentance was preached by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and also the disciples and apostles in the early church. Why do modern preachers think they can improve on this by focusing on prosperity and self-help messages? It is time to return to preaching the message John preached, Jesus preached, and the apostles preached. Repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Jesus never sinned in his life. His purpose in baptism by John was to identify himself with sinners he came to save. Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. His goal was to take the place of sinful man and be the lamb of sacrifice who stood in our place as our substitute. The Lord Jesus is and was completely sinless. He is innocent, pure, and holy. Yet he was baptized by John to fulfill the righteousness of his purpose and mission.

God the Father set his seal of approval on the Lord Jesus and proclaimed Jesus Christ to be his beloved Son. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove. All three persons of the one God in one section of scripture. I don't see how anyone can read this and deny God is three in one.

Also, to further underline the truth that God is three in one we have **Matthew 28:19**, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."*

Notice John the Baptist is described in detail in regards to his clothes and also what he ate. Why did the Holy Spirit include these details about John the Baptist? I think one reason is to reveal something about

the gift and the calling of a prophet. A man whom God makes a prophet is outside the world system. He is peculiar, and will never fit into the world system anywhere. He may go along with people for awhile but eventually whatever he does fails. Why? Because the prophet works for God. He preaches the gospel. We have the work of someone who prophesies given to us by the apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 14:3**, "*But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*"

This is what John the Baptist did in his ministry. We have his specific words recorded for us so we can also hear his exhortation. His words were to edify the believers, exhort those who were backslidden or unbelievers, and to comfort those who went into the water. Each Christian can be used by God at times in this capacity, but there is still a specific gift in the church called 'prophet'. There are men and women who are prophets within the church today. These men and women are almost always unknown. They wash the feet of the saints through their ministry of intercessory prayer and words of edification, exhortation, and comfort.

The gifts in the church we never hear about today are apostles and prophets. There is a reason for this, which I won't expound on now, except to say these men and women do exist and are almost always completely unknown except by their close friends. Those who teach the bible in front of churches and are titled pastors generally make very little of prophets or apostles. I'm not sure why they do this, but even in pastors I greatly admire I notice how they are dismissive toward the gift of apostle and prophet.

John the Baptist did not preach in a church building. He preached out by the Jordan River and God sent people out to where he was. He told men they were sinners and should flee from the wrath of God. He called the religious leaders of his day "snakes" which in my mind, at least, associates them with the serpent we know as the devil. How many religious leaders are there today who are really vipers? It would probably frighten us to know. I'm sure those Pharisees and Sadducees were not at all happy with the prophet dressed in fur and ate locusts.

Chapter 4

Previously when I read this chapter I viewed the temptation of Jesus as his preparation for ministry. This time as I read this I view it more as Jesus completely identifying with man in temptation.

When Jesus was baptized by John he fulfilled all righteousness. I believe Jesus is continuing the same goal of completely identifying with man in mankind's sin and in mankind's temptation. This is so men can completely identify with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. I also think this temptation revealed who Jesus was to the enemy.

It is interesting how these scriptures are worded. The Holy Spirit brought Jesus into the wilderness "*to be tempted of the devil*". God does not tempt any man with evil. We know this from **James 1:13**. There is, at the same time, a peculiar way God brings a man into situations where the devil is waiting. Why is this? It is not to hurt us, I can assure you.

On our part it is a purifying process for our faith. For Jesus I believe it was so he would be completely identified with mankind.

Jesus was tempted in every way we are and yet he was without sin. (**Hebrews 4:15**). Also, another purpose in his enduring this temptation is so he could show us the way to overcome the temptations of the devil. He shows us by his example how to overcome.

Hebrews 2:18, *"For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."*

Jesus did not overcome the temptation by anything which the common Christian man is not able to also employ. Jesus laid aside supernatural powers when he fought the devil and simply spoke God's word. Jesus quoted scripture. He spoke the truth of God's word, and it was a hammer which broke the rock of temptation into pieces. In the hands of Jesus the word became a sword which slashed and seared the enemy.

There is a parallel here in the temptations of Jesus with the temptation Eve went through in the garden of Eden. The parallels are laid out for us by the apostle John in **1 John 2:16**, *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* It is these three areas Satan enticed Eve. It is in these three areas also he based his temptations against the Lord Jesus. Whereas Eve and Adam fell into darkness, Jesus did not fail. He resisted the devil, and the devil had to flee.

James 4:7, *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*

God has promised he will not allow the enemy to tempt us beyond what we can bear.

1 Corinthians 10:13, *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."*

After the enemy left, angels came and attended to the Lord Jesus. No doubt they brought him food and encouragement as well.

The imprisonment of John the Baptist was a turning point for Jesus. He moved to the area of Galilee and set up in Capernaum. Matthew sees this as fulfillment of prophecy which speaks of light coming to the Gentiles living in this area. This prophecy was from Isaiah the prophet.

The message which Jesus preached was: *"repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"*. This is the same message John the Baptist preached.

The Lord Jesus called his disciples to follow him. Listed are Simon and Andrew, along with James and John. These seem to be the first called and these men made an inner circle with Jesus among the twelve disciples. It was Peter, James, and John which Jesus later chose to accompany him up on the mountain where he was transfigured. He also chose Peter, James, and John alone to go in with him when he raised a young girl from the dead.

When Jesus called these men to follow him the scripture says they "immediately" or "straight away" left what they were doing and followed him. This is how we should be. We should not hold on so

tightly to circumstances, people, possessions, or our employment when Jesus calls us to follow him. We should be ready to drop everything to follow where ever he will call us to.

As Jesus began his ministry he preached and taught in the synagogues. As he did this he also healed people. People were healed from all kind of sickness and disease, including people possessed by demons, lunatics, and people with epilepsy. These are some of the illnesses mentioned specifically here.

I do not believe Jesus or the Holy Spirit or the apostle Matthew writing this were confused about epilepsy being demon possession or called epilepsy "demon possession". It is very straight forward here in the text that these problems were separate issues. We should not attempt to malign scripture with lies that people in those days were so stupid they didn't know the difference between epilepsy and demon possession. There may be some overlapping symptoms, but I guarantee you Jesus knew the difference.

There is indeed a serious problem with demon possessed people, not only in ancient times, but even more so here at the end of the age.

Chapter 5

This collection of the words of the Lord Jesus is called 'The Sermon On The Mount'. The Lord Jesus demonstrates he is the fulfillment of the scriptures in the law and in the prophets because only the Lord Jesus lived out the sermon in which he taught them that day.

In the Bible previous to the first coming of the Lord Jesus there was a description of God's character and nature through the governmental, business, and societal laws for Israel. Also, we have accounts of God's people, their history, and specific men and women who were prominent in the formation of Israel's history and God's revelation of himself.

When the Lord Jesus appeared he fulfilled the scriptural revelation of God. He is the word of God who is made flesh. He is the expression of the written word of God in every way. When he opened his mouth and spoke it was the revelation of God.

He taught them first by revealing who is blessed. Who is blessed? Do you want to be blessed by God? This is who you are if you are blessed. You are poor in spirit, you mourn, you are meek, you hunger and thirst after righteousness. You are merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker. You are persecuted by the world because of who you are. The world will revile you and slander you for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus said we can rejoice when the world persecutes us. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The Lord Jesus fulfills all of the scriptures. He shows us the true spirit of the law, and upholds the law of God by his life and example. To those who twist God's law and take it out of context, to those who use religion for position, power, and control he has scathing words of condemnation.

The Lord Jesus takes the ten commandments and teaches the true spiritual demand those laws require. Not only is man condemned if he murders but he is also condemned if he has selfish anger or hatred in his heart. A murderer is not only someone who kills but someone who hates and is angry.

Therefore we should not be angry or hate people but instead seek reconciliation. We should desire to be reconciled to people around us. As much as possible we need to live in peace with people.

Not only is someone who commits adultery guilty but someone who looks on another with lust in his heart. God sees what is in the heart of man and not just his actions. The Lord knows what kind of person we are even if we do not carry out what is in the heart because of a fear of repercussions.

The way to deal with men who make themselves our enemies is to overcome their evil with good. We do this by praying for our enemies, and praying the Lord would bless them. If they make demands then we go beyond the demand and do more than is asked of us. Let us demonstrate by our actions how gracious and loving and forgiving God is. We are God's representatives on this earth. Remember we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The goal of our lives is to live like our heavenly Father. God is perfect, and therefore his children must also live a perfect life.

Chapter 6

The Lord Jesus examined the motives of men when they give or pray. The religious leaders were an example of what not to act like. This is a backhand rebuke to the religious leaders. He described how they acted and said, "Don't act like this."

The Lord Jesus emphasized that the heavenly Father discerns what people do and knows motives when men engage in religious activity. It is right to suspect motives of men who engage in religious activities in public. The unbelieving world is suspicious of people who claim to be religious, especially when they claim to be Christians. The Lord Jesus is also concerned about why people perform religious activities especially religious displays in public.

The Lord Jesus teaches us that instead of performing religious activities in public to do these things in secret or try not to be noticed by others. When we pray in secret and give to others in secret then we do not have to worry about wrong motives or insincerity. What is done is not as important as the attitude of one's heart while engaged in benevolent or religious activity.

The Lord provides a framework for praying according to the will of God. I won't go over every detail of this model prayer, but I think it should be pointed out who the Lord Jesus taught us to direct our prayers to. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray to our heavenly Father.

Speaking of "fathers": not everyone is a child of the heavenly Father. I've heard people say something like "we're all God's children" but that is not true. There are people who are not God's children but are the children of the devil. The Lord Jesus teaches this in **John 8:44**, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.*"

The Lord Jesus also touches on motives behind the observance of fasting. His teaching here is the same as what he said about giving and praying. We should not try to impress others with fasting but instead keep it between ourselves and God alone.

Forgiveness is a bedrock issue with the Lord Jesus. He teaches if we do not forgive others who sin against us then our heavenly Father will not forgive us. It is absolutely essential to forgive everyone who sins against us. We are not allowed to hold grudges, bitterness, and hatred. Doing this separates us from God and his forgiveness. It is frightening to think how much our relationship with God depends on us maintaining correct relationships with everyone in our life. As much as it is possible with us we should try to live in peace with everyone. Blessed are the peacemakers.

The Lord tackles the subject of provision. Unbelievers are completely focused on creating provision for themselves. They go after money with all their heart and along with this comes lust for prestige, position, and power. This is idolatry and covetousness. It is the worship of self over worship of God.

Notice the words the Lord Jesus uses here to teach us what kind of attitude we are to have towards material provision: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what shall ye shall drink..."

I'm sure many people have a huge problem with this, myself included. Take NO thought? What does that mean?

I think it means exactly what the Lord Jesus says. I believe we are to completely roll these burdens of life over onto the Lord and trust in him to provide for us. Does this mean we stop working or quit our jobs? No, I think what he is saying is don't be obsessed with provision.

Our purpose in engaging the world through work is primarily to be a witness for the Lord Jesus. This follows what Paul said in **Colossians 3:23**. Whatever we do we are to do it for the Lord. Our labor is for the Lord no matter what the work is.

There are individuals in the body of Christ that the Lord Jesus sets aside for the purpose of serving the church. This may sometimes include those who stand in front of congregations on Sunday mornings. There are individuals who are gifts to the church and work for the Lord alone. They trust completely in the Lord for their provision and protection. The Lord himself is their portion and inheritance.

To understand more about this read how the Lord set apart the Levites. They did not get a land inheritance in Israel. Instead, the Lord himself was their inheritance. They were the servants of Israel and of the Lord. The same is true today in the church. There exist in the church today apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These are the Lord's gifts to the church.

What the Lord Jesus addressed here is the difference between how a Christian's attitude needs to be in stark contrast to the unbeliever's attitude.

The unbeliever has no resource except his own intelligence and abilities. For the Christian, however, we trust in God to provide for us. We do the best we can and trust the Lord to take care of us.

I've seen this in action many times in my life. I've been hired for jobs at companies where people much smarter and educated than myself found it impossible to get hired. Yet I walked right in and got hired!

How is that? Because I was not trusting in myself but trusting in the Lord to take care of me and my wife.

The Lord Jesus says to not allow the purpose of our life to be about obtaining provision (food, clothing, shelter, transportation, medical supplies). We are not to make this the goal of our life. Instead, the goal of our life is to seek God's kingdom and righteousness. We put the interests of God as the goal of our life and when we do this the Lord promises he takes care of our material needs.

I find this promise absolutely true. I have been taken care of by the Lord. Ever since I was saved by the Lord I've seen him provide for all of my needs.

Also, isn't it a great relief to know you are taken care of? Wouldn't you feel such freedom if you won a million dollars? You would know your needs are taken care of for a long time.

But we have every resource available to us in God's kingdom. Just because God's kingdom is invisible does not mean that it isn't real!

The resources in the kingdom of God are real and we can trust God to supply our needs every single time. Don't live your life in fear. Do not worry about running out of material resources.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and see the Lord provide for you.

It is easier to trust in the Lord rather than worry. The result of thinking I'm the only one who can help myself is a life of stress and anxiety. I would much rather simply obey God's word and live in peace.

Chapter 7

The Lord Jesus deals with the subject of hypocrisy. Most people think the subject here is "judgment" but it is not. What the Lord Jesus discusses here is hypocrisy.

When a man is guilty of hypocrisy he can only see problems in other people but does not apply this same "judgment" to his own life.

The real point is not that we should overlook sin in other people's lives. This cannot be the correct interpretation because later in this same chapter in verse 15 the Lord Jesus exhorts us to beware of false prophets. How can we beware of false prophets if he forbids us to judge people? That seems like a contradiction.

The point is not for us to quit judging others but the point is to make sure if we get involved in pointing out a problem in someone's life we have already resolved the same problem in our own life. It is hypocrisy to point out problems in another person's life when we have the same problem in our life.

Again, let me repeat, because these verses are quoted out of context constantly: the Lord Jesus is not teaching us to stop judging. If you do a word study on the word "judge" through the New Testament you will find Christians are supposed to use discernment and good judgment. **John 7:24**, "*Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment*"

Verse 6 seems to stand alone but for me I connect this verse back to the preceding verses. Unbelievers and false Christians quote verse 1, "judge not, that ye be not judged". In the past when it was my job to correct people and I heard them quote this I knew more than likely I was dealing with what we cover in verse 6, "...neither cast ye your pearls before swine..."

It is important not to try and correct an unbeliever or someone who is pretending to be a Christian. Why is it important? Because dealing with these people will only get you damaged. They will not receive what you say and they will drag you down into the mud and rend you with their tusks. It is stupid to try and help someone who does not want to be helped. Leave them alone and go help someone else who wants help.

I'm not implying we stop preaching the gospel, but don't attempt to correct unbelievers and false Christians. (See also **2 Timothy 2:24-26**)

How can you tell a false Christian from a true Christian? A true Christian is usually willing to listen to correction. A false Christian always defends self (in contrast to denying self).

The Lord Jesus teaches persistence in prayer works. The Lord is willing to answer prayers which are prayed according to God's will. He hears us and we can be confident he will answer our prayers. Don't give up praying. Ask, seek, and knock. Keep on asking the Lord, keep on seeking the Lord, keep on knocking on the Lord's door. He will open and he will answer. The Lord responds when we cry out to him. The main thing is to not give up but keep on believing. There are plenty of verses throughout scripture we can stand on to encourage us to persevere in prayer.

Once again verse 12 seems like it might stand alone, and it does, but in my mind I tie it back to preceding verses, especially since there is a "therefore" connecting these verses together. In light of our requesting something from God, we need to pay attention to how we are relating to people around us. We need to make sure when we pray we also live a life in which prayer can be heard. **Psalms 66:18**, "*If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:*"

The kind of man the Lord is looking for to answer prayer is the one who walks a straight and narrow life.

Straight and narrow means he only trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not trust in himself. He doesn't turn aside to other religions, philosophies, or psychology. He keeps his heart fixed on the only way to the Father and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. (John 14:6)

Many people cannot bring themselves to trust only in the Lord Jesus. They turn to programs, 12 steps, support groups, philosophy, other religions. They turn to answers which the world provides them. But I say to you: if you are walking down any other path except the Lord Jesus Christ you are on the broad road to destruction.

Some people on the broad road claim they have the Lord Jesus and their eastern religion but this is a lie. They are deceived if they think they can hold on to Buddha and the Lord Jesus at the same time. They are deceived and are fallen in the trap of the devil. It is man's pride which motivates him to seek something or someone other than the Lord Jesus. It is human pride, plain and simple.

People on the broad road become false prophets. They are false examples, false teachers, and spread lies around without even thinking about it. They magnify lies through everything they do. They set examples and precedents through words, actions, attitudes. Everything in their life is designed to draw others into the broad road to destruction. Once a person does not fully accept the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way to God then they automatically accept the lie of Satan. The lie fills them, overflows, and touches every person they come into contact with.

The same is true for the Christian in the opposite direction. A true Christian has the aroma of Christ and inspires others to deny self and lay down their lives for the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. I've been graciously given many opportunities to meet true Christians and this experience changed me. It infected me and drew me onto the straight and narrow road with them.

It saddens me when I come across someone on the broad road. It is obvious when you are around someone like this.

They don't need to be involved in a gross sin. You can just pick up on it. It's the way they talk, or don't talk, or listen, or don't listen. It is not difficult to discern someone on this broad road to destruction. They have the aroma of hellfire and their tongue is quick to curse, condemn, hate, slander, deceive, and gossip. These are the fruits to look for in people who profess Christ but are lying.

Notice the Lord tells us to beware of these false prophets. It is important to discern them and stay away from them. Do not listen to their podcasts and messages. Do not tune into their radio station or TV channel. Stay away from them. Your spiritual health depends upon it.

The Lord Jesus makes it clear that not everyone who claims to be a Christian is really a child of God. People claim to be a Christian for worldly motives and purposes. A lot of people make big money claiming to be a Christian. There are many reasons why people lie about being a Christian. Eventually it becomes plain who they really are. Stay away from them.

Whoever hears what the Lord Jesus is teaching and puts these principles into practice in their lives builds on a solid foundation. When we build our lives upon the solid rock of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ then we will not be blown away when the storms of life come. We will continue to hold fast and stand. The Lord is a sure foundation. Everyone who builds their life upon worldly principles and unbelief will eventually lose everything they worked for.

Chapter 8

When the Lord Jesus completed the sermon on the mount he helped the people who followed him. A leper who worshiped the Lord Jesus asked for healing. He said, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Of course the Lord Jesus was willing to heal the leper. He touched the man and healed him. For the people this was like raising the man from the dead because in those days leprosy was a death sentence.

People ran away from lepers but the Lord Jesus went towards the leper and touched him. This gives us a picture of how God deals with us in our sinful condition. Instead of running away from us God heals us, cleanses us, and gives us new life. The Lord Jesus is the express image of the invisible God and what we see in the compassion of the Lord Jesus reveals the heart of Father God towards men.

The Lord Jesus instructs the leper to go to the priests and follow the law in resolving the issue of leprosy. In my opinion, the Lord Jesus did this because he desired for the priests to receive a witness of the Lord Jesus. He wanted them to repent and be saved as well.

A Roman centurion requests healing for his servant. The Lord Jesus is willing to go into the house of this Gentile to heal the servant but the Roman centurion expresses his faith in the authority of the word of the Lord Jesus to heal. The Lord Jesus says he never found this kind of faith within the nation of Israel. This man did not need a prayer cloth or the physical presence of the Lord Jesus to heal his servant. He just needed the word of the Lord.

To this day we need only the word of the Lord in order to be healed of sickness and disease. The Lord can save, heal, and deliver. He can raise us from the dead and does so every day. Let us press on to believe the Lord's word and receive healing which he has for us today.

After this encounter with the Roman centurion the Lord Jesus taught that Gentile believers would sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He made it clear some of those who were in Israel would not be at that feast and would instead find themselves outside where there is darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. The same is true today of many who are in the church but do not truly believe in the Lord. They will find themselves outside where there is darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. These are the brothers of the flesh who persecute the brothers of the Spirit.

I believe what the Lord Jesus described here is that not all those within the outward structure of Israel, church, or the nations are true believers. The false believers live in the house of faith but do not believe in the Lord.

There is a remnant within the body of professing believers who are the true believers and sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These are the ones who are of the faith of Abraham, no matter what time period they were born in, whether during the first day with Israel, the second day with the church, or the third day in the millennial kingdom.

As the Lord Jesus continued to heal people and drive out evil spirits, including healing Peter's mother of a fever, Matthew points out that what the Lord Jesus did was the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah.

Many people approached the Lord Jesus with a desire to follow him. However, the Lord Jesus often countered their shallow commitment with a challenge. One of the challenges he gave is that the Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head. What does that mean? It clearly meant the Lord Jesus lived like a pilgrim and sojourner. He did not buy houses and lands or seek to set up his home on earth. He had a mission and he lived his whole life to complete his mission.

The Lord Jesus warns us today, if we follow him, it could mean great hardship and loss of material things. Have we counted the cost? Once we put our hand to the plow to follow the Lord Jesus we cannot look back. We cannot retrace our steps.

The Lord Jesus instructed his disciples to go across the lake and while they were on the way they encountered a storm. This storm was so bad the disciples feared for their lives, while at the same time the Lord Jesus was asleep in the boat. Out of fear they woke him up and he calmed the storm.

When they reached the other side they were confronted with a demon possessed man. This man was possessed by a legion of demons, and tormented by them. The Lord Jesus cast the demons out of the man and healed him completely. As a result the people in that region asked him to depart.

Why did they ask him to depart? Perhaps they were afraid, or maybe they saw he was a direct threat to their business of raising pigs? I don't know. But I have seen something similar in my own life. There are people in my family who saw what the Lord Jesus did for me. However, what the Lord Jesus did for me did not cause them to want him. Instead, they turned away from him like these people in the area of the Gadarenes.

I do not understand it. I was like this man, and told everyone who would listen what the Lord did for me.

Chapter 9

The Lord Jesus left the Gadarenes since he was not welcome and returned to Capernaum. He was greeted by a crowd who brought him a man sick of the palsy and laid on a bed. Jesus promptly forgave the man of his sins. Before he could heal him he discerned the evil thoughts of the religious leaders who watched him. He rebuked them for their evil thoughts and proved he had authority to forgive sins by healing the man completely.

The Lord Jesus treated the whole man and not just the spiritual. It is good to remember the Lord Jesus is still the Great Physician. Earthly doctors fail but the Lord Jesus never fails in his task. We need to ask him and the Lord can heal us. Let us put our trust in the Lord and pray for complete healing in our bodies. The Lord is able to heal us and deliver us from sin, the devil, and disease.

The Lord Jesus called the publican Matthew to follow him and he ate with sinners and publicans. See the divine doctor at work, humbling himself, and going to those who need him. Whereas the false doctors go into their private buildings, wait for people to come to them, and then cast out anyone who doesn't follow their rules. The modern church and doctors are like those ancient hypocritical leaders of society. They preen about with their prestige and pomp while all the while the people they are supposed to help languish in their suffering.

When they dared to ask the Lord Jesus what he was doing he made a simple remark I wish doctors and preachers today would hear: "*They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*"
(**Matthew 9:12**)

The Lord Jesus used illustrations to teach them to go forward with God, and not keep looking back to types, figures, and shadows in the law which pointed to Himself. He is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets. He used the illustration of sewing an old piece of cloth on another piece. It doesn't work because they both will tear. Also, one can't pour new wine into an old wine skin because it will burst.

The Lord taught me this lesson several times. Over twenty years ago the Lord showed me not to retrace my steps or go backwards. Always go forward with the Lord; don't go back. Again, he showed me this recently and I think it finally stuck to me: do NOT retrace your steps. Don't try to make what is new out of what is old. Old people, places, and things have to be left behind. It is time to go forward by faith and forget the things which are behind me. I must go forward by faith into what the Lord has for me next.

A certain ruler came to the Lord Jesus because his daughter was sick but by the time they got to her she was dead. On the way to raise the girl from the dead the Lord Jesus was touched by a woman who had an issue of blood. She tried many doctors and no one helped her. This keeps with our theme about worthless doctors which permeate society and rob people of their money and don't help people.

Here we see one touch from the Lord Jesus and the woman was completely healed from her illness. She knew immediately she was healed. The Lord Jesus continued onward to raise the girl from the dead.

The Lord Jesus said an interesting thing about the condition of the girl. He said she was not dead but asleep. I can interpret this a lot of ways. It might mean she was literally sleeping but in such a deep sleep they thought she was dead. Or she was dead and the Lord Jesus spoke in a spiritual sense that she was not dead because He is the resurrection and the life and to him no one is really dead. The Lord Jesus can raise anyone from the dead. He himself is resurrected from the dead and is the first to receive a resurrection body! In this particular miracle Matthew only says he took her by the hand and she was raised up from the dead.

See how the Lord Jesus forgave sins, healed sickness, drove out evil spirits, and raised people from the dead. He proved to everyone that he was indeed the Messiah, the Christ of God.

The Lord Jesus had compassion on the crowds because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They did not benefit from the leaders of their society, but wandered without anyone to teach them or heal them. Therefore the Lord Jesus asked his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth laborers into the harvest fields.

I believe this is a prayer we should include in our devotions every day. Pray to the Lord he will send forth laborers into the harvest to seek and to save those who are lost. Be prepared to be the answer to your own prayer as well.

Chapter 10

After his request that the disciples pray to the Lord of the harvest the Lord Jesus appointed his twelve disciples and gave them authority to minister. The prayer request was answered. They received authority to cast out devils, heal people, and preach the kingdom.

Here is a list of the disciples beginning with Peter and ending with Judas the betrayer. These twelve pair up with one another for the task at hand. The Lord Jesus gave them specific instructions on how to behave, conduct themselves, what to bring, and where to go in their mission. The parameters of this initial mission trip was to the lost sheep of Israel. This was not a mission to evangelize the world with the gospel but instead an outreach to the lost sheep in Israel with the message of the kingdom.

The Lord provided a list of specific instructions for the disciples but his talk expanded beyond the scope of that mission and anticipated what the apostles and church would face as they preached the gospel to the world. This began in the book of Acts with the record of Paul's testimony before Roman rulers and his persecution from religious leaders.

Jesus exhorted them several times not to fear what men would do to them but instead fear the Lord God who has all power over our lives. He gave a graphic contrast in that men can kill the body but God can not only kill a man but cast his soul into hell.

Jesus warned them they faced fierce opposition even arising from their families. Those who once were close now became fierce enemies. When men follow Jesus earnestly they find their worst enemies are family and relatives. **Verse 36**, *"And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."* This was the experience Jesus had. He came to his own but his own did not receive him. **(John 1:12) Matthew 10:37**, *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

The true test of someone who loves Jesus is family relationships. It is easy to justify maintaining family relationships with those who hate Christ and hate God because we tell ourselves we will witness to them and win them to Christ.

This excuse is similar to the lie a young lady told herself who started dating an unbelieving young man. "I'll win him to Jesus." But what the young lady did not realize, and what this man or woman who puts family before God does not realize is this: we cannot win anyone to Christ if we compromise biblical principles.

If we make agreements and experience intimate relationships with unbelievers we are disobeying God's word. We cannot disobey the word of God and justify it by telling ourselves we are disobeying God's word because we are trying to win our families to Christ.

The only hope unbelieving family members have of coming to Christ is for us to come out from among them and be separate. They will never respect the professing Christian as long as we live just like they do. They will never respect us or listen to us as long as we live in agreement with them.

Sooner or later the unbelieving family member or "loved one" will turn your heart cold towards the things of God. They will turn your heart cold towards the bible, or spending time with other Christians, or even professing the Lord Jesus around them.

They can influence the compromising Christian like this because the only power the Christian has in his life is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will not disobey God's word and will not support the professing Christian who disobeys God's word.

When we put family before the principles in God's word then we have effectively made the statement we love family more than Jesus.

When we make this statement Jesus says to us: "Not worthy".

You are not worthy of Jesus. You have turned your back on the Lord Jesus when you love family more than you love Jesus. And you do love family more than Jesus when you disobey God's plain word and make agreements with unbelievers and are intimately familiar with unbelievers. You are dead wrong and you are unworthy of Jesus. You cannot and will not experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life if you are putting family before God. The only relationship you will have is that he will continue to convict you of your sin and compromise and backsliding.

Let us evaluate our relationships with people in the light of what the Word of God says. Let us not deceive ourselves by familiar emotions we have for people. If we live our life according to emotion we will eventually live in disobedience and rebellion against God's word. Obedience to God's word demands we deny our self and take up our cross and follow Jesus. Don't be deceived by emotions. Don't be deceived by unbelieving family members.

Jesus says if we confess him before men then he will confess us before the Father. However, if we deny Jesus before men then Jesus also will deny us before the Father. This is the biggest deterrent we could possibly have in caving in to the fear of man. We must be brave and courageous in the face of men who attempt to come between us and Jesus Christ.

Remember what Jesus said about opposition that the Christian will encounter. He said in verse 22, *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."*

When I read this verse I am reminded that Christians today are beheaded for their faith in Christ. This is happening right now in Iraq and areas where these murderers are butchering Christians. Let us remember to pray always for our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are enduring to the end.

Chapter 11

The Lord Jesus made it clear that John fulfilled bible prophecy. John was the one who came to prepare the way for the Messiah, as Malachi said. John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the return of Elijah. My guess is we shall see this prophecy fulfilled again in the seven years of tribulation with the two witnesses described in Revelation chapter 11. This is how we see bible prophecy. It is more like a set pattern that repeats itself rather than a one time event or person.

John sent messengers to the Lord Jesus to ask if he was the one or should they wait for another? Evidently while in prison John's faith was shaken, but the Lord Jesus sent word back to John to think about all that the Lord Jesus did which proved who he was.

The works of the Lord Jesus testified to who he was. Do our works testify that we are Christians? Do our lives reflect the Lord Jesus Christ?

I think John may have expected a different kind of Messiah than the Lord Jesus. It seemed Israel expected a Messiah who would overthrow the Romans and establish the kingdom of Israel. These expectations are not unfounded because there is plenty of prophecy in the Old Testament pointing to the establishment of God's Kingdom on the earth.

However, in his first appearance on earth he fulfilled the prophecies of the suffering servant and the Lamb who gives his life to save us. He is the substitution and sacrifice for us. Later, when the Lord Jesus appears on earth the second time it will be as the King of the nations. At that time he will establish God's Kingdom on the earth. This is what we continue to pray for as the Lord Jesus taught us in the model prayer: *"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*.

The Lord Jesus contrasted his ministry with John and concluded that no matter what approach the servants of God make in ministry they were rejected by the religious leaders. John came as one who abstained from the world and everything in it. He was a harsh man who lived apart from everyone else in the wilderness. The Lord Jesus was much different from John in his personality. But the religious leaders rejected them both.

The Lord Jesus pronounced several woes upon different cities where he preached. His woe upon them was based upon their exposure to truth and knowledge of the kingdom of heaven. The principle is that the more you know the more you are accountable. Perhaps this is why people do not really want to get too close to God or hear God's voice. The closer we get to God and the more we know of him the more accountable we become of that knowledge.

I have experienced the power of God to change my life into a different man. I experienced a dramatic transition from darkness to light in my life. At one point I was completely blind and in darkness. The next moment I stood in the brilliant presence of the Lord with my eyes blinking wide open. The Lord changed my life in a moment. This has happened to me twice, once when I was a young man in 1989, and then again as an older man in 2014.

He continues to change me in small and big ways. I no longer want to draw back from God's presence. I want to be thrown into the light of the Lord Jesus Christ and receive revelation of him.

I heard his voice. I want to hear his voice today. I want to hear him speak to me. I can see he is changing me and gives me a greater fervor for holiness and a greater hunger for righteousness. My heart cries out to the Lord Jesus.

When I read the final verses in this chapter my heart cries out, "Amen! Lord, I come to you and I want to find rest in you alone. Lord, grant me grace to take your yoke and your burden because it is easy. I cannot live under the taskmaster of self and Satan. I desire to live only for you, Lord Jesus."

Matthew 11:28-30, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

The Lord knows we are weak and bowed down. He experienced humanity when he was here with us in human flesh. He knew what it was like to be weak and frail in a human body. Not only do our bodies get tired and sick and wore out but also our mind and emotions get worn down over time. We run out of gas each day, each week, each month, each year that goes by. I do notice this more and more as I get older. I don't have the strength or stamina of mind or body I once had.

The Lord Jesus invites us to come to him. This is more than an invitation. This is also a word of command: "Come unto me". Don't go to the world or embrace the world's solutions. The world system

cannot fix you. They are as blind and helpless and hopeless. We do not want to settle in the congregation of the dead. Instead, we want to go to him. The Lord Jesus speaks to us today, if you can hear his voice. He says, "Come unto me."

Why does the Lord Jesus want us to come to him? Because he is the only way. He is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other way to Father God except through the Son the Lord Jesus Christ. He who has the Son has the Father also. But he that does not have the Son of God does not have Father God. If we turn aside from the Lord Jesus, there is nothing left except empty religion, philosophy, and then death.

Let us turn our heart to the Lord Jesus now. When we do we find rest for our soul. He heals our mind, our emotions, and our body. He gives new life to our spirit within us. Our spirit comes alive and can sense the kingdom of heaven. Our spirit can hear, see, and feel the Lord Jesus.

The only rest is the Lord Jesus. All places of rest in this world are false. They want you to pay for rest but the Lord Jesus gives rest freely.

Why do people turn away from the Lord Jesus? I do not know. All I know is that his word is true and he gives me rest for my soul.

Chapter 12

Jesus provoked the religious leaders by what he knew gave them a reason to accuse him.

I am glad Jesus used the Sabbath to provoke religious people because even today the Sabbath is confused by religious people. People use the doctrine of Sabbath to bring men into religious bondage in the same way the ancient Jewish Christians used circumcision.

They attempt to lay the burden of the law on the shoulders of men but Jesus fulfilled the law of God for us. We cannot fulfill God's law; only Jesus can fulfill God's law.

Those who insist Sabbath keeping is part of serving the Lord today do not understand what the Lord Jesus accomplished in his completed work upon Calvary. Jesus said, "**It is finished.**" He completed everything for us: salvation, sanctification, justification, and glorification. All of this was done by the Lord Jesus. We enter this gift by faith in what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished. There is nothing we can add and we cannot take anything away from it

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The only work we have is to believe in the Son of God.

When the religious leaders rebuked the disciples of Jesus for eating grain on the Sabbath the Lord Jesus rebuked them and said he was the Lord of the Sabbath. Since Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath then all I need is Jesus. When I have Jesus I have everything I need, including the Sabbath. Jesus is my day of rest. **Colossians 2:16**, "*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:*"

Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and as a result the religious leaders wanted to kill him. This demonstrates how crazy a man is when he is possessed by a religious spirit.

Jesus withdrew from these murderous people and continued to serve and help those who needed him. Matthew points out that Jesus fulfilled the scripture in Isaiah: "*A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, til he send forth judgment unto victory.*" (**Matthew 12:20**) This demonstrates the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. He invites us to come to him and find rest for our souls. He does not turn anyone away no matter how broken or messed up our life is.

I remember when this verse became important to me. I was a young Christian working in a ministry for people with life controlling problems. One day as I read Isaiah I ran across this verse and knew it applied to the Lord Jesus. I underlined it in my Bible and wrote in the margin "never give up on anybody". I needed this every day because there were plenty of reasons to give up.

The Lord Jesus doesn't give up. He does not give up on anybody. He did not give up on me, even though for many years I gave up on myself. I never turned my back on the Lord Jesus since I was saved in 1989. But I lived for years when I did not obey his specific calling on my life.

He did not give up on me. No matter how bruised I was, no matter how low the fire of faith burned in my heart: he did not give up on me.

Eventually the wind of the Holy Spirit blew on those glowing embers again. He put some kindling in the stove of my heart. He blew on those tiny flames until my life glowed with his presence again. I can feel the flames of the Holy Spirit burning again in my heart right now. I feel the heat of God's word burning in my bones and in my body and filling my heart and mind. My spirit is alive, thank God, my spirit is alive.

I thank the Lord Jesus Christ today for giving me life and life more abundantly.

I thank you, Jesus, for saving me and giving me life. I love you Lord Jesus! Amen.

When Jesus cast devils out of people the religious leaders accused him of casting out devils with the power of Beelzebub. They said Jesus used sorcery to cast out demons. However, Jesus warned them of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

As he rebuked them he warned them that every idle word men speak they will give an account of. By a man's words he is justified and by a man's words is he condemned.

There is no other verse I know which underlines so strongly the importance of only speaking words which are good and edifying. We should pray always that God will set a guard and a watch over our mouths that only what is good will come out of us. This is another reason it is so important to be renewed in the spirit of our mind by reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating upon the word of God.

Jesus says the people who hear him would be more accountable than the ancient pagan cities which God judged with fire and brimstone. Why? Because the more light we experience the more we are accountable. We need to live in the light we are given. To whom much is given, much is required.

Jesus' family came looking for him. They interrupted Jesus while he taught the people. Jesus told the

people his mother, brother, and sisters are those who hear God's word and put it into practice. This points back to what Jesus said earlier in **Matthew 10:37**, "*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*"

Chapter 13

Jesus taught the people with parables. When asked why he taught in parables Jesus said parables were used so that some would understand and some would not understand. Spiritual seekers could understand the parable but others who did not seek truth would not understand. This latter group assumed Jesus was telling children's bible stories.

This is true today. Unbelievers think Christians gather to listen to children's stories. But those who hunger and thirst for righteousness know that within the gospel the greatest hope is contained. The gospel is the power of God for salvation.

The first parable described how different people received the word of God. The meaning of the first parable explained the purpose why Jesus spoke in parables. The word of God was like seed which fell on different kinds of soil. People have different attitudes and hear the word of God according to what is currently in their heart. In other words, those who have no intention of obeying God's word can never understand it.

Those whose hearts are set on the world system hear God's word according to that attitude.

Those who have their hearts set on the kingdom of God hear the word of God in a much different light.

Jesus gave four different types of soil. The first type was "wayside" soil, the second was "stony places", the third was soil encumbered by "thorns", and the last category was good soil.

When the disciples asked Jesus for the meaning he told them the different soil types were different categories of people who heard the word of God. Also, another point to remember is that "fowls" who came to eat up the seeds are equated with Satan. Throughout scripture birds are often a symbol or type of evil person or evil spirit.

In the second parable Jesus again spoke of sowing seeds but this parable had an entirely different meaning. This second parable was about the end of the age and a harvest. Jesus described angels binding evil people and casting them into fire. The righteous people were separated from the evil people. The righteous were rewarded but the evil people faced punishment. It is clear Jesus teaches two groups of people exist. The context of this parable was within the church. The tree represents the church but it was an abnormal and monstrous tree with "birds" growing in it. This describes how the church was infested with people hosting evil spirits and unconverted people who take control of the outward church. A lot of this describes the aberration of Catholicism but also many other cult offshoots sprout from Protestant churches.

We are unable many times to know true from false brethren but we can rest in the fact that God knows the difference. A time comes when God separates those of the flesh and those who are of the spirit. I am reminded of the parable of the ten virgins also when I think about this end time judgment.

In verse 44 the third parable began. This was the parable of the pearl of great price. In this parable we see the value which the Lord Jesus placed upon his church. He gave everything, literally pouring out his life, to purchase this pearl of great price. This demonstrated the value which the Lord placed upon the church.

When Jesus asked his disciples if they understood they reply that they understand. He encouraged them, therefore, to also teach others what he taught them.

Jesus returned to Nazareth. As we know, a prophet is without honor in his hometown and among his own people, so he was unable to do much for these people. They did not have faith or belief in him.

Now let's take a closer look at this verse which describes the angels who separate the wicked from the just.

Matthew 13:49-50, *"So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."*

Twice in Matthew chapter 13 Jesus taught there was a separation between two groups at a future judgment. In this judgment angels came forth as agents to separate the wicked from the righteous. The wicked were cast into a furnace of fire where they wail and gnash their teeth. Hell is very real and is a place of punishment for the wicked.

The question we should ask ourselves right now is this: "Who are the wicked?"

The bible told us who the wicked were very plainly. **2 Thessalonians 1:7-9**, *"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;"*

Angels cover the planet and looked for every person who was not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every single man and woman who did not know or believe in the Lord Jesus Christ was taken by the angels and cast into a furnace of fire where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth.

This is a serious subject to consider. This should urge us who are saved to pray more fervently for our lost family and friends. We should earnestly intercede on their behalf. We pray their hearts will soften to the truth and they may repent and put faith in Jesus Christ.

I don't think anyone this side of eternity can truly comprehend the finality of death. We always think there is more time in life, more chances to live, another day, another week. But as we have seen recently with the sudden death of multitudes we are not promised another day. Death can come at any time. Satan roams this planet looking for those whom he can devour. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Our only hope against the certainty of death is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ was crucified, he died, and he was buried. On the third day he rose from the dead and afterward he ascended into heaven. He is now at the right hand of the father and is able to save to the

uttermost those who come to God through him. There is no other way. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to God except through him. (John 14:6). He will return again to receive Christians to himself so that where he is we may be also. Even so, Lord Jesus, return to us quickly. Amen.

Chapter 14

John the Baptist publicly corrected Herod. As a result he was imprisoned by Herod. He was not immediately executed but the devil inspired a plot which resulted in his beheading.

Jesus departed the area and was pursued by crowds who asked for his help. Jesus fed the thousands of people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus blessed the food, gave it to his disciples, and the thousands were fed. Twelve baskets were gathered after everyone ate.

The feeding of the thousands with five loaves and two fish was recorded in all of the gospel accounts. This was a central message in the gospels. This miracle reflected how God fed the people of Israel in the wilderness under Moses. It showed that Jesus fulfilled the qualifications of the Messiah.

It was not yet time for Jesus to be crowned king of Israel at that specific time. First he needed to go to the cross and so he dismissed the crowd after they were fed and left overs collected.

After the people ate and the disciples collected the leftovers Jesus instructed the disciples to enter a boat and cross the lake. Meanwhile as they left Jesus climbed a mountain and found a place to pray.

Since the Lord Jesus took time to pray so should we. We need to spend time communing with the Father in isolated prayer. This communion is vital to spiritual life and spiritual growth. Christians are called not only to pray for themselves but to also intercede for the church and the salvation of the lost.

We pray and intercede for the church. We pray the church will be revived in our generation and Christians will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We need to pray for Christians to have an evangelistic fervor to reach their coworkers and their families for Christ.

We need to pray for Christians all over the world who face persecution and martyrdom for their faith. We need to pray that in the face of adversity our brothers and sisters will be strong in faith and not fail.

We need to pray for leaders and for those who are in authority.

We need to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers and workers into the harvest field.

We need to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and salvation for Israel. The gospel is to Jew first and then the Gentile as well. We need to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Israel.

We need to pray for an end to the murderers who persecute and kill Christians and Jews in the middle east.

The Lord Jesus walked out to his disciples on the lake. When the disciples saw him approach they were afraid and thought he was a ghost. He reassured them that it was he.

Peter, filled with a little faith, asked the Lord if it was really the Lord Jesus to allow him to go out on the water as well to meet Jesus. Jesus invited him to come out on the water. At first Peter kept his eyes on Jesus but when he looked to the left and right and saw the stormy waters he began to sink.

This is a good example of how faith works. When we fix our faith on Jesus we rise above the law of sin and death. We defy the gravity of a sin stained life but when we turn our eyes upon self or circumstances we immediately fall.

Peter does the right thing by calling out to Jesus to save him. Jesus saved him, they got into the boat, and immediately they were at the shore.

This reminds me of **Hebrews 12:2**, *"Looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith..."* We do not need to look anywhere else for salvation, deliverance, healing, or peace in life. Jesus is the way to the heavenly Father. Let us not glorify or pursue any other religion or philosophy but Jesus only and the gospel alone.

Jesus healed crowds of people in the area of Gennesaret. Some were healed only by touching the hem of his garment.

Let us go back now and focus on when Jesus went up into a mountain to pray.

Matthew 14:23, *"And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone."*

When Jesus came to earth he became fully man. No doubt as a human he became exhausted. He needed time alone to pray and seek his Father. He needed this just like we do today.

A lot happened in his life. He received news his good friend was murdered in prison. He evaded the attention of Herod by moving to another area but the crowds continued to follow him. He was filled with compassion for the crowds of people who found him. He served them, healed them, fed, and taught them. He fed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish.

He also had much to look forward to in the hours, day, and weeks to come. This going up into a mountain apart reminds me of the time he took his disciples up into a mountain and was transfigured before them. Perhaps he sought this encouragement from his heavenly Father and also spoke with Moses and Elijah.

When he came down from the mountain he walked on water. He walked across the sea to where his disciples saw him and they thought he was a ghost.

The only way forward in our lives is to seek the Lord in private prayer. It is where we will find the encouragement, focus, and also revelation from the Lord which enables us to rise above our circumstances.

If Jesus needed to seek time alone for prayer we certainly need to find a secret place to pray. The only thing which hinders this secret prayer is pride in our hearts. Pride makes us think we can live in our own determination and willpower. It tells us our own opinions are more important than hearing from the Lord himself. It is pride which leads to unbelief. This kind of unbelief places little value on prayer and seeking God.

We need to lay aside this pride, and humble ourselves, and seek the Lord. It is time to seek the Lord.

Chapter 15

Here we see a remarkable contrast between the religious leaders and the Lord Jesus.

They attempted to correct him for eating with unwashed hands. This was a violation of their religious tradition.

The Lord Jesus turned the table and demonstrated how they disobeyed the clear commandment in God's word to honor parents by their giving to man-made religious organizations instead of their parents.

The Lord Jesus looked at the heart of each matter and did not treat anything from a surface perspective.

He rebuked his disciples for their lack of insight into what he taught them. He explained to them plainly that what a man eats goes into the stomach and is then expelled. But what comes out through his mouth (in speaking) comes from a heart where there is murder, adultery, blasphemy, and a list of other sins.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus taught them to deal with the heart of the matter and not the surface. It was superficial to be concerned about washing hands when people were taught to dishonor their parents. It was superficial to worry about what foods were clean or unclean when they spoke blasphemy and evil.

The Lord Jesus described the religious leaders as "straining a gnat and swallowing a camel." They majored on minor points. Their perspective was upside down and inside out.

This is what happens when the world system infiltrates the house of faith. It focuses on what God despises or is unimportant. The American church is a good example of what the Lord Jesus repudiated in the religious leaders of his day.

This woman from Canaan was a Gentile and she pursued Jesus so her daughter could be healed from demon possession.

This is an interesting account since the Lord's words and actions seem peculiar when looking at this encounter on the surface.

However, we are taught by the Lord in the preceding verses not to look at an issue on the surface but attempt to see the real heart of the matter.

If we look at the entirety of the life of the Lord Jesus we know he was always moved with compassion by the needs of everyone who came to him. Several times Jesus went out of his way to minister to Gentile people, including a demon possessed man in the Gadarenes and the servant of a Roman centurion.

So why does he say such odd things here and seem to brush off this woman's request? We must attempt to read between the lines of what Jesus said.

It is true Jesus had a priority mission during his earthly ministry to Israel first. The gospel goes to the Jews first. However, within this priority there was time and room for Gentiles.

Ultimately we see God's plan, revealed by the apostle Paul, that the church is comprised both of Jews and Gentiles. This plan takes shape throughout the book of Acts.

So what was happening here with this Gentile woman? In my opinion, I think the Lord Jesus challenged the faith of the woman and also the prejudices of his own disciples. I think he pushed her and challenged her faith. He was also showing his disciples that God does love people outside of Israel.

Does the Lord do this at times with us today? Does he sometime delay answers to prayer in order to stretch our faith and cause us to grow in grace?

Yes, we are called to persevere in faith and to pray continuously.

Sometimes the prayer request may seem impossible to us, but nothing is impossible with God. We must continue to come before God's throne of grace and not give up.

This woman did not give up. Finally the Lord said to her, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

This is what I seek in life. I want to pursue the Lord Jesus until he turns around and says to me, "Mike, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

From that very hour the woman's daughter was healed.

Jesus went up to a mountain and sat down. The people followed him there and brought all of the sick people. He healed all of them. The blind, dumb, and maimed. The dumb spoke, the maimed were made whole, the lame walked, and the blind could see again. They all glorified the God of Israel.

Jesus had compassion on them and, working with his disciples, fed this multitude of people using seven loaves of bread and a few fish. This was the second miracle of provision. This miracle was for the provision of the people who were there but it was also a lesson for us today. The Lord Jesus is our provider. Jehovah Jireh is our provider.

What did Jesus say about the religious leaders?

Matthew 15:14, *"Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."*

This was the response the Lord Jesus gave when the disciples told him the religious leaders were offended. Jesus said to leave them alone.

How can we apply this to our current religious system? Is it true these modern churches are run by men who share the same characteristics as these ancient religious leaders whom the Lord Jesus repudiated?

Leave them alone.

How can I apply this to my life today? One simple way is to not listen to men who obviously preach a false gospel.

One false gospel is the one which focuses on self-help rather than denying self and laying down one's life for the Lord Jesus and the gospel.

Popular preachers promote what is generally known as the "prosperity" gospel. This false teaching grew out of hyper-faith distortions from previous decades of heresy in Pentecostal and charismatic circles. I don't condemn all the teachings of Pentecostals and charismatics but it was in those churches this cancer started (as far as I know in my own personal experience and through my own research).

False gospels may include some truth but they focus on unimportant points rather than proclaiming the same truth which Jesus and the apostles taught.

Some preach only doctrine rather than the gospel. This also can lead to giving people wrong ideas about salvation, justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Some churches only focus on their distinctive and do not teach the entire counsel of God's word.

Others claim to preach the bible chapter by chapter but take so much time focusing on unimportant trivia that the true message of the gospel is drowned in a million insignificant details.

We need to preach the entire Bible while at the same time emphasizing the gospel which the Lord Jesus and the apostles taught.

The only way a preacher can do this is when he himself is immersed in God's word. If the word of God is in the man it seeps into his comments while he speaks. The spirit and mind must be saturated with the word of God.

As a sincere Christian I do not need to listen to any man who is a "blind leader of the blind". I do not want to support them, their churches, or their ministries with my time, energy, or resources. I do not want my family to sit under their false teachings. I do not want to expose myself on a continual basis to false or distorted bible teaching.

Do I really think I am more spiritual than those early followers of Christ of whom he warned "Let them alone"?

If I continue to subject myself and my family to false teachers then I am also disobeying the command of the Lord Jesus when he said "Let them alone".

Let's remember scripture teaches us to fellowship with those who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.

2 Timothy 2:22, "*Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, **with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*"**

Chapter 16

The religious leaders challenged the Lord Jesus to show them a sign. The Lord Jesus demonstrated many times who he was but they did not believe. They had no desire to believe in the Lord Jesus. Their request was not sincere but they looked for more reasons to accuse Jesus.

Jesus told them they were an evil and adulterous generation and no sign was given to them except the sign of Jonah.

Jesus explained the sign of Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days. In the same way, Jesus was in the belly of the earth three days and he resurrected the third day.

This is the sign given to unbelievers: the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel Jesus preached and the apostles preached: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus warned his disciples to stay away from the leaven of the religious leaders. They interpreted this in terms of literal bread but Jesus warned about the teachings of the religious leaders.

How can we apply this to our life? We must be filled with the true bread of life, Jesus Christ. We must feed upon this bread of life so when we encounter false teaching we can discern it and stay away from it. The only way to discern leaven from true bread is to know the true bread first. Once you know the truth you won't be easily deceived by lies of false religious leaders.

Jesus takes his disciples to an area by themselves to have a conversation. This area was called Caesarea Philippi.

He asked, "Who do men say I am?"

Their reply was that some believed he was John the Baptist returned from the dead. Others believed he was Jeremiah, Elijah, or one of the prophets returned.

Then the Lord Jesus asked them, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter spoke up and said that he knew the Lord Jesus was the Christ of God.

Jesus told him and the group not to share this information with anyone else. Even though it was true Jesus is the Christ at that specific time it was not yet the hour for everyone to know this. People had many ideas about Messiah and what Messiah should do.

Jesus made it clear only the heavenly Father could reveal this to Peter. We can only know the Lord Jesus Christ by revelation given to us from God. There is no other way men can truly know the Lord Jesus except by revelation from God.

Jesus taught about denying self and taking up our cross.

After he confirms he is Messiah Jesus taught them his mission was to go to Jerusalem and die on the cross. This was to fulfill the scriptures which describe how Messiah suffered and died as the Lamb of God to bring salvation.

However, Peter did not understand and tried to correct Jesus. Jesus rebuked Satan who was really the one who inspired these words through Peter.

It is interesting how Peter could be spiritually influenced by the heavenly Father one moment and then later he repeated what the devil said.

Jesus rebuked him and taught them unless they deny self and take up the cross they cannot be his disciple.

Verse **24-26**, *"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

I like to quote this because this is a message we don't hear much anymore. This is a message of losing your life and not improving your life! This is the message we need to hear right now in the church if we want to be part of God's remnant in these last days. We are called to lose our lives and not improve our lives. We are called to lay down our lives for Jesus and for the gospel.

Who Is Jesus?

Matthew 16:15-16, *"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

This question was really the most important question any man will answer in his life. Who is Jesus? Whether or not a man answers that question now, he certainly will answer that question later on.

Eventually, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (**Philippians 2:10-11**)

However, we do not want to wait until it is too late for us to benefit from knowing him. We can know the Lord Jesus right now and we can receive eternal life by knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. If we wait

until after we are dead or after he returns it will be too late to benefit from knowing who he is. We can benefit right now from knowing the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Who is Jesus? Many people attempt to discredit the Lord Jesus. Entire religions are devoted to blaspheming who he is and discrediting him.

Every cult and false religion out there in some way mocks, ridicules, belittles, minimizes, or outright blasphemes who Jesus Christ is.

However, one day that will end. One day everyone will know who Jesus is. For many it will be too late but for those who know him and love him now we will enter joy unspeakable and full of glory. We shall see him as he is and we will be like him.

Who is Jesus? He is not just a man, not just a prophet. He is the Son of the living God. He is the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior. He is the way, and the truth, and the life. No man can come to God the Father except through the Lord Jesus Christ. (**John 14:6, Acts 4:12**)

Jesus died on the cross and shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. He was buried in a tomb. He rose again the third day. He was seen and witnessed alive by many witnesses, including the apostles he chose. He ascended to heaven and promised he will return again. The angels there on the day he ascended said he will return again in the same manner he ascended.

Zechariah 14:4, *"And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Chapter 17

The Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured on a mountain. The Lord Jesus took three disciples with him up on the mountain: Peter, James, and John. There was no explanation as to why these three disciples were taken. We do know, however, from the second letter of Peter it made a big impact on Peter's life. (**2 Peter 1:16-18**)

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain Moses and Elijah spoke with him. The disciples recognized these Old Testament saints. Peter blurted out he was glad they were there because they could build three tents for them. However, he was interrupted by God the Father from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased! Hear him!" (**Matthew 17:5**) If these disciples were not already awed by the transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of Moses and Elijah they were now awe struck when they heard God's voice. After the glory of God withdrew the disciples looked up and there was only Jesus.

The disciples asked the Lord Jesus about Elijah. The Lord Jesus said Elijah did come and John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah making the way for the Lord.

They met a man whose son was a lunatic. The symptoms resembled an epileptic but this man was not an epileptic. He may have displayed similar symptoms but this problem clearly came from a demonic source. This does not mean or imply that every person who suffered from epilepsy was demon possessed. As a matter of fact, other scriptures make it clear that Jesus and his disciples understood the difference between epilepsy and demon possession. Do not listen to people who malign scripture with the lie that people in ancient times did not know the difference between epilepsy and demon possession.

The man approached Jesus because the disciples could not cure the man's son. The Lord Jesus was grieved by the lack of faith in his disciples and cast the demon out. The man's son was completely cured.

The Lord Jesus explained to his disciples that this particular demon only came out after fasting and prayer. Some demons are more difficult to cast out than others. See also Ephesians chapter 6 for more information on spiritual warfare.

After this Jesus taught his disciples again about his death and resurrection. Jesus described to his disciples he would be killed but rise from the dead on the third day. Evidently the disciples could not understand or did not believe what he said but these statements make the disciples very sad.

The Lord Jesus taught he was not obligated to pay taxes since he is the Son of God but so no one would be offended he told Peter to pay the tax with a coin he found in the mouth of a fish. Jesus gave him detailed instructions on how to catch the fish with a hook and get the coin out of the mouth of the fish. From this we learn to give Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. We pay our taxes but we give our heart and life to God and not the government.

Matthew 17:21, *"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."*

This discussion with his disciples about the reasons they could not drive out a demon was couched between the Lord Jesus being transfigured on the mountain and another conversation with his disciples about his death and resurrection.

Within this context the incident of the man's son who was lunatic is a side note. However, it is important to look at side notes. But let's remember within the context Jesus was shown in glory and was predicting his death and resurrection. All spiritual warfare needs to be seen in the light of the glory of Jesus Christ and in what he accomplished in his death, burial, and resurrection. It is easy to get distracted by the drama which the enemy creates. Demons enjoy getting attention or distracting us to our own self instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should focus always on what Jesus did for us.

There are two reasons why the disciples were unsuccessful in healing the man's son of the devil. One reason was a lack of faith. The other reason was this particular devil was more resistant. The Lord Jesus said this "kind" only goes out when the one commanding it to leave was prayed up and fasting.

This underlines the importance of living a disciplined life of prayer and also setting aside times for fasting.

I go through different times when I fast, not just from food, but also from normal activities people engage in such as entertainment. It is good to take a step back from constantly feeding our minds on entertainment and technology. It is good to get out of this mindset and think about something else besides what is in the news headlines.

The Lord Jesus spoke of fasting from food. Jesus never said his disciples would not fast. He was questioned one time why his disciples did not fast as did the disciples of John the Baptist or even the Pharisees. Jesus replied they did not fast because he was still with them. But a time would come when they would fast.

No doubt when they were all in one accord in the upper room before the day of Pentecost they fasted while they prayed.

Also, we see an example of Peter fasting when he receives the vision of the sheet let down from heaven three times with the "unclean" foods in it.

Saul of Tarsus, after he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, fasted and prayed until Ananias prayed for him and he was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Some people may have a difficult time fasting because of health issues like diabetes. In these cases I think fasting from things such as entertainment and spending time reading the Bible and praying is a good alternative fasting.

Let's remember there are spiritual enemies which cannot be defeated except through special consecration from the Christian. We should take this to heart and make sure we pray and spend regular seasons fasting.

Chapter 18

When the disciples considered greatness in God's kingdom they probably thought of the greatness of the Roman government and their religious leaders. This "greatness" was the exact opposite of the greatness which Jesus taught.

In God's kingdom greatness is measured by humility. Jesus illustrated by setting a child in front of them and explained that greatness in God's kingdom is like a humble child. He taught them unless they changed their minds about "greatness" and became as humble as a child they could not enter the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who humbled himself like a child was considered great in the kingdom of heaven.

This demonstrated that the world system we live in is completely upside down and inside out from who God is and what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Satan took what he knew about God and turned it upside down and inside out in order to imprison mankind in this world system. This system suppresses all which is spiritual about man. This system exalts the material, glorifies money (provision), and puts emphasis on exalting self above others. The world system is opposite of the kingdom of heaven.

This is why the disciples found it difficult understanding greatness. If they were brainwashed by the world system how much more are we brainwashed and deceived in today's world?

Today we have media, the internet, television, radio, entertainment, and the news. We are saturated every day with propaganda from Satan and a corrupt world system he built in rebellion against God.

The Lord Jesus made an interesting statement in verse 5: "*whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*"

He described the attitude the world had against the humble Christian.

The world hates Christians because Christians express humility like Jesus. The world hates this attitude because it does not fit their mindset of competition, pride, and self-improvement. They cannot abide humility and mock it as being childish, naive, or sheep-like.

Humility is all of those things. Christians are child-like, naive (innocent as doves, discerning as a snake), and sheep-like. Jesus used the illustration of sheep to describe his followers.

We should take to heart the warning the Lord Jesus issued against those who would harm "these little ones". I believe the Lord Jesus spoke of literal children, new Christians, and also in contrast to the world the true Christian is a "little one".

Hear the woe Jesus pronounced upon those who offend these little ones? I cannot think of a worse fate for anyone than those who stumble new Christians, children, or Christians in general. The Lord Jesus said it would be better if a millstone were hanged around their neck and they were drowned in the depth of the sea.

The Lord Jesus taught how serious it was to allow sin in our life by using a graphic contrast of cutting off a limb or gouging out an eye to avoid sin. He said it would be better to enter heaven maimed than to go into hell with both hands or both eyes.

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." (verse 10)

The Lord Jesus taught about the ministry of angels who watch over children, new Christians, and Christians in general. Angels watch over us. I pray I do not do anything to embarrass or cause these angels shame while watching my life. May the Lord help me to bring honor and glory to the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus revealed the heart of the heavenly Father toward these little ones. It is not God's will any of these little ones perish. The Lord desires us to be reconciled to God and part of reconciliation with God is a right relationship with people.

The Lord provided a pattern in reconciling relationships with others. I knew people who used these scriptures to justify throwing someone out of fellowship but this was not what the Lord Jesus taught here. The Lord Jesus did not give instructions on how to get rid of someone.

When reading this in context we know it is God's will to save every straying sheep. These instructions were given to restore a man who went astray.

How sad that people instead use these same verses to justify putting people out of fellowship, ministry, or church.

When the Lord Jesus said "let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" do you automatically assume that meant shunning the man?

I once thought shunning is what Jesus meant until I stopped and realized Matthew's gospel is written by a former publican and heathen.

The Lord Jesus was not telling us to throw someone away!

The Lord Jesus said when a man rejected our one-on-one attempt at restoration, and he rejected multiple people trying to restore him, then the real work of praying and interceding truly begins.

The Lord Jesus called publicans to serve him as apostles. The Lord Jesus ate with publicans and sinners. The Lord Jesus was not in the business of throwing away people. He tried to save men and not throw them away.

The Lord Jesus spoke on binding, loosing, and agreement. I think the Lord Jesus taught about intercession and praying for the brother who went astray. The Lord Jesus painted a picture of how we should bind every devil in hell which was influencing the straying brother. We should fast, pray, and not give up on anyone who goes astray.

The Lord Jesus left the ninety-nine and looked for the one lost sheep. Why do we assume these scriptures talk about putting a brother out of fellowship?

It is sad how religious people abuse scripture in order to throw away people in their fellowship, ministry, or church.

For more confirmation look at Peter's response to Jesus' teaching. He was amazed to learn that he should show such grace and mercy to an offender. He offered to forgive someone seven times. But the reply of Jesus was not seven times but seventy times seven.

Basically we should never stop forgiving anyone or loving anyone. We should always hope for the best and continue to believe God to turn the brother around.

He told them the parable about fellow servants who are forgiven debts but one of these servants does not forgive a fellow servant. As a result, the master of the servant brings judgment upon the hardhearted servant.

The Lord Jesus taught us this: if we do not forgive others, we will not ourselves be forgiven. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Don't forgive, and your heavenly Father will not forgive you.

Even on the cross as he died Jesus forgave those who tortured and killed him.

Forgiveness is a vital issue which connects human relationships to our relationship with God. Let us not forget to forgive people from the heart. People may still hate us and shun us but at least we can go to God in prayer and say freely, "Lord, I forgive! I forgive, oh Lord, I forgive them!"

Matthew 18:20, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

We should drill this into our head over and over: physical, material buildings made with stone, lumber, and cement are not the church! It doesn't matter if we put the biggest steeple and cross in the county on top of the building that is still not the church.

The New Testament made it clear that physical buildings were not the church, but the church was people who believed in the Lord Jesus. The building was a meeting place for believers.

However, believers can meet anywhere. Church can be anywhere two or three believers gather together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Honestly, there were times in my life I felt more of God's presence when I stood sharing my testimony in a prison than in church buildings in front of stone-faced religious people.

Do we believe the promise of scripture here?

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them".

If the Lord Jesus was in the midst of us then we were in church. We do not need a roof over our heads, or a pulpit, or a choir loft. We don't need any of this. Sure, those things are nice and encouraging if used properly in the right perspective.

In my experience when people say "let's go to church" they do not mean they go to meet other believers. Instead, they mean they go to a building where they sing songs and listen to a man stand up on a platform and give a speech (most times about things not even in the Bible).

I experienced the best church with just me and one other. My best memories of church was with one brother and a ragged bible on the table in between us. I cherish the memories of drinking coffee and sharing the things of God with a brother. I felt the Holy Spirit in those meetings and my life was changed.

I also sat in hundreds of "church" meetings where my heart was more discouraged when I left than when I arrived.

From now on I do not want to be part of dead religion. I don't want any part of entering buildings full of spiritually dead people who go through religious routines. Instead, I will search for individual brothers and sisters in Christ who call upon the Lord out of a pure heart and who are hungry for more of Jesus.

Matthew 18:19, *"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."*

How can a Christian read this and not be blown away by what the Lord Jesus said here in this verse of scripture.

Agreement is a principle of life.

In order for two people to agree there must be something outside of them they both touch on. This something outside might be an abstract idea. It might be a goal. It might be a course of action or a decision. But it is something outside which touches both people in the circle.

Why do people agree? Unbelievers agree with unbelievers because of the possibility of personal gain or because they are programmed to believe an idea. These two things control most of what we see in the world: selfishness and propaganda.

Propaganda can be traced back to a group who made an agreement with one another for personal gain. This is why we have propaganda. Someone learned how to manipulate the masses into doing something or believing something which brings gain to those who create the propaganda.

To make this simple: agreement is basic to human life. We cannot live in this world without agreements. The motive is almost always for personal gain or survival.

There is an exception to this. Agreements can also be based upon the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus turned agreement right side up and agreement with him is not based on selfish gain. Instead, agreement with him is based on truth.

People uncover spiritual laws and label them as "seed faith" or whatever. However, when these laws are employed for selfish reasons men return to the world system and act according to the principle of self. Christians who do this are operating according to the world, sin, and self.

I do not say anyone should employ spiritual law for personal gain. I do not think the Lord Jesus taught us to use spiritual law for personal gain. The Lord Jesus did not live for self. He lived for his heavenly Father and poured out his life unto death. The Lord Jesus did not live according to self or use spiritual law for himself.

When people do this they practice witchcraft. People who use spiritual law for self actually are not Christian but satanic. Satan teaches men spiritual law so men will corrupt themselves with self worship.

There is righteous agreement which is with God's Kingdom. This agreement comes when two people humble themselves and submit to the Lord Jesus. They see the truth of scripture and understand who the Lord Jesus is and see God's kingdom with spiritual eyes. They will die to self and live for God's kingdom and the gospel.

When people like this gather then the Lord Jesus is there with them and when they agree together it is according to God's will. They do not agree unless they perceive God's will. Their hearts are set on

God's will. They do not agree unless they see the will of God. When Christians come together in agreement in the presence of the Lord there is great power for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

We are vessels of honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use. We separate ourselves for God's purpose. We live for the glory of God. When we see a course of action it is because God shows it to us and when we agree it is the confirmation of what the Lord set in place. We can rest assured of this. We have confidence if we ask anything according to God's will he hears us. And when we agree we know we are in God's will.

Agreement based upon revelation from God like this is not transient. It is constant. It does not change. The Lord does not change. Years may pass before the fulfillment of God's promise but it will come to pass because God set it in place. It did not originate from us. It came from God and will come to pass.

Here are more scriptures related to this:

John 14:13-14, *"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."*

1 John 5:14-15, *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."*

Chapter 19

The Pharisees questioned Jesus, not because they sought truth, but because they tried to get him to contradict the law of Moses. They wanted ammunition to use against him. Their questions were designed to trap the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus condescended to answer their questions and in the process taught us a great deal about God's original plan for marriage.

The Lord Jesus returned to Genesis to answer questions from the Pharisees. They asked him about divorce, but he taught them God's plan for marriage. He used the example of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as the ideal marriage which God planned. The Lord made them male and female and those two became one flesh. This is the plan of God for marriage. Anything else is against God and is against nature as God intended. The further away from this people get the more they invite God's wrath and judgment upon themselves.

Once again the Lord Jesus showed he was concerned about children despite the impatience of his disciples. The Lord Jesus blessed the children. This is an example churches follow with the pastor blessing newborn babies in dedication ceremonies.

The account of the rich man and the Lord Jesus was also told in Mark and Luke. Since this was related in three of the four gospels I count it important in understanding who God is. This shows us how the Lord Jesus responded to people who came to him for eternal life and how to truly become a follower of Jesus Christ.

The underlying root problem of the rich man was his money. He obeyed the 10 commandments which deal with the relationship with our fellow man but his problem was money. Money was his idol and his god. This man trusted in his wealth and his money more than he did God.

Money is not every man's problem but it was this man's problem. Some problems a man may have could be drug addiction, or alcohol, or various lusts. This man's specific problem was money. This is a common problem as the Lord Jesus pointed out how difficult it was for people with a lot of money to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The problem with money is the effect on a man. A man who goes through the process of obtaining it in the world system is conformed to idolatry. The love of the money is the root but the problems it produces are pride, covetousness, and idolatry. In order to amass wealth in the world system it is inevitable a man will leave broken lives in his wake. Paul said this problem drowns men in temptation.

I think it is ironic that American Christians desire to acquire as much money as they can. Where can you find Christians who are willing to give up everything in order to follow Jesus?

It may seem impossible that anyone would give up everything they have to follow Jesus but with God all things are possible.

The Lord Jesus promised his disciples that every man who gave up everything to follow him would be rewarded. There is primarily a spiritual reason to give up everything to follow Jesus: eternal life, which is more important than anything a man can obtain in this life.

The Lord Jesus said if we seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness these other material, physical needs are met as a matter of course. We need to keep our focus on following the Lord Jesus and not turn aside to materialism. The enemy is very subtle. He can cause us to covet the stupidest things in order to get us turned aside from following Jesus with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Here is an interesting promise the Lord Jesus gave the twelve apostles who left everything to follow him. **Matthew 19:28**, *"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* This has not yet happened, even now. I think we would know if this had taken place by now. There is still yet a time in the future when there will be twelve tribes in the nation of Israel and each tribe has an apostle sitting on a throne over each tribe.

This is interesting because it reveals God still yet has plans for the nation of Israel. There is an intermingling of the church and Israel but the nation of Israel is still very distinct and separate from the church.

God is three in one so also the people of God are three in one. The people of God are Israel, Church, and the Kingdom. There are three seasons or periods of time on the earth. The first is Israel, the second is the Church, and the third one is the Kingdom. This is seen by three items within the ark of the covenant: the law, the rod that budded, and the pot of manna. These three are one. (Hebrews 9:4)

The twelve thrones for the twelve apostles. That is quite a thought and I think a nice correction for those who think the church replaced Israel. True Christians today have the same faith Abraham had.

There is always one true spiritual people of God whose faith rests upon the promise of God which is the Lord Jesus. He is the Seed! He is the Promise. Those whose faith rests upon Jesus Christ alone are the true people of God no matter what season of time they lived in.

Speaking of God's future plan: do people stop and realize that the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven in the book of Revelation has the names of the twelve tribes of Israel upon it?

Revelation 21:12, *"And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:"*

Does this indicate God has future plans for Israel? I think it does. The church did not replace Israel. We are all one and are those who have the faith of Abraham. In each one of God's three days the outward shell of God's people looks different (Israel, Church, and the Kingdom) but underneath we are the same and are united by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 20

The Lord Jesus told a parable which showed what the kingdom from heaven was like. It seemed the fairness in the kingdom from heaven appeared as unfairness depending on the attitude of the one observing the king and the kingdom.

It was not unfair for a man to be generous with his money. However, those who measure according to the principle of self viewed this man's generosity as unfair. Those who saw unfairness interpreted what they saw according to the principle of self. Those who saw generosity judge according to the principle of grace.

There are two ways to live: according to grace or according to the law. Remember: the same measure we use on others is measured to us as well.

This is why I want to live by grace. I do not want to judge according to self interest. I want to discern life by grace. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The Lord Jesus saw what was before him. He spoke of his death and resurrection often but no one understood what he said. I'm convinced the same is true today. World events and bible prophecy literally scream that the return of King Jesus is at hand but who is listening? Who is paying attention?

The prediction the Lord Jesus made of his death and resurrection were set in contrast to the request of James, John, and their mother.

They did not understand greatness according to the kingdom from heaven. They were programmed to see greatness according to the world system. They thought greatness was reigning over others like Roman kings or religious leaders who created rules to oppress people.

The Lord Jesus made it clear that the kingdom from heaven was the opposite of the kingdom of this world. The kingdoms of this world, as they currently exist, have no part in the kingdom from heaven. In the third day when the Lord Jesus reigns as King over this earth we will see true spiritual authority in government.

Until then we suffer under the oppression of government, business, and society as it is now. This current world system oppresses the spirit in man and exalts the material and physical. This current world system makes men into idolaters who are covetous, full of lust, pride, and murder.

The kingdom from heaven is not like this. In the kingdom from heaven the man who serves and lays down his life is the one who is great.

The Lord Jesus knew this was the future of James and John despite their misunderstanding of what greatness truly was. These men indeed faced tribulation in the world but the Lord Jesus promised the apostles they would one day sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The blind men cried to the Lord Jesus and called him "Son of David". The Lord Jesus responded to their cry and he healed them of blindness.

Matthew 20:25-28, *"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."*

The Lord Jesus taught on greatness as a result of this mother's request. She approached the Lord Jesus and requested that her sons be at his right and left hands in his kingdom. This occasion provided the Lord Jesus the opportunity to teach what greatness truly meant from the perspective of God and eternity.

My thought here is that the Lord Jesus never rebuked her or her sons for desiring greatness but instead redirected their idea of what greatness was. We should aspire to be great in the kingdom of heaven but we need to understand greatness in God's kingdom is the opposite of greatness in the world system that we currently live in.

The world system creates the illusion of greatness by individuals who lord themselves over others through oppression, manipulation, and deception. This is not difficult for men to do because men who do not believe in God are slaves to self-worship. Every man who is a slave to self-worship desires above anything to exalt himself over others. He is controlled by the lust for prestige, position, pride, and is driven by the desire to compete, win, and overcome other people. The business world and sports world are examples of this.

Government, business, and society are controlled by the serpent poison of self-worship. They make a name for themselves. They create power and authority through making a name and bringing numbers under their name to effect influence and persuasion. This is witchcraft which at its core is control of others in order to exalt self.

Most people who pursue their daily routine in government, business, and society have no idea how united together with Satan they are in principle, goal, and purpose.

Most Christians are blind to this also from what I have seen in my experience. They do not see or understand how the plain word of God applies to their everyday life situations, their relationships with others, and the end-goal of their life pursuit.

If the end goal is self they are not living for the kingdom of heaven. If a man is living solely and completely for self he cannot be a Christian. Unless you deny self you cannot follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore greatness in the kingdom of heaven is servanthood. A man who is great in the kingdom from heaven is a man who puts others before himself. A servant is someone who acts on behalf of others. A Christian's goal is benefiting others. By benefiting others through self-sacrifice and self-denial we indeed serve and follow the Lord Jesus.

We deceive ourselves when our goal in life is money or self-gratification and then we think we are a Christian. We are not Christian if we think and live like this. We follow the natural course of unbelievers united in essence, principle, and spirit with the serpent Satan. **John 8:44**, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.*"

It is not hard to discern the children of the devil from the children of God. If you are a child of God it is obvious when you encounter people who follow the devil. The children of the devil worship self. The children of God deny self and worship the Lord Jesus by dying to self and living for others.

Self-help, self-improvement, and any psychology, philosophy, or religion devoted to self in any aspect is influenced by demons. These doctrines of demons the bible warns us about are rampant in the last days.

Do you want to be great? Then deny self and be a servant. Become a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter 21

The last part of the journey approached as the Lord Jesus traveled to Jerusalem. The Lord Jesus moved with determination toward his destiny at the cross. He knew his every action fulfilled the prophecy of the Messiah. He moved toward Jerusalem with the end and a new beginning in sight.

The Lord Jesus no longer told people to be quiet about the fact he was the Messiah. Now everything was done in public. The Lord Jesus allowed the crowd to hail him as Messiah.

The Lord Jesus gave specific instructions to two disciples to obtain transportation for him to enter Jerusalem. The way he chose to enter Jerusalem was fulfillment of prophecy about how the Messiah would enter Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. Matthew made sure we understood this was the fulfillment of prophecy and gave us the exact scripture references.

When people cried out "Hosanna" they were proclaiming the Lord Jesus was the Messiah. Perhaps some did this because everyone else did it. Even the children sang his praise on that day.

The next step on entering Jerusalem was that the Lord Jesus cleansed his Father's house of the wickedness of the money changers. This was a public demonstration of his authority as Messiah. He called the temple his own house.

When he finished cleansing the temple then those who needed healing came to him for help.

The cursing of the fig tree was one of two destructive miracles the Lord Jesus did. The other was when he allowed demons to go into a herd of pigs who threw themselves into the ocean.

Some try to draw a parallel between the fig tree and the nation of Israel but scripture says whoever curses Israel will be cursed. I do not believe the fig tree represents Israel because then the Lord Jesus would be cursing Israel. I do not believe this incident represented the nation of Israel rejecting the Lord Jesus.

The disciples were amazed at the miracle of the fig tree but the Lord Jesus taught them if they had faith and did not doubt they could speak to a mountain and it would jump into the sea. Here was the actual lesson of the fig tree. The Lord Jesus taught about faith and that nothing was impossible for him who prayed and believed.

The religious leaders challenged the Lord Jesus but he corrected them. He pointed to his predecessor John the Baptist. He told them the harlots and publicans heard John the Baptist and repented but the religious leaders did not repent. Those who heard John heard what the Lord Jesus said.

In the parable of the obedient and disobedient sons the Lord Jesus made the point that though Gentiles and sinners may not at first obey God when they hear the gospel they eventually repent and turn to God. Many who were great sinners enter the kingdom of God but those who trust in self righteousness remain outside the kingdom.

This points us to what Paul taught in his letters. Paul contrasted the difference between the righteousness of Christ and our self righteousness.

We cannot trust good works or following religious laws to earn righteousness. When we trust in the Lord Jesus we receive the righteousness of Christ.

Salvation is a free gift from God. It is obtained by believing and receiving the Lord Jesus and the work he accomplished in his death, burial, and resurrection.

The Lord Jesus warned the religious leaders about what they did. They plotted to kill the Son of God.

The Lord Jesus knew it and told them what they would do through a parable. He said those who fall upon him are broken but those upon whom he fell were crushed to powder. The lesson is that it would better to come to the Lord Jesus when he offered mercy. If we refuse to come to the Lord Jesus now he promised he would return later and then it will be too late. When the Lord Jesus comes again he brings the wrath of God upon earth.

Chapter 22

Per the requirement of the religious law a sacrificial lamb needed to be inspected to confirm it had no spot or blemish before being offered. In the same manner, the Lord Jesus was inspected and they found no fault in him. They tried hard to find fault but were unable to do so.

The Lord Jesus told them the parable of the wedding. The master who sent out the invitation for his son's wedding is Father God. He gave an invitation to the nation of Israel by sending his Son to them. Through the gospel accounts we see how the religious leaders rejected the Lord Jesus even though the common people heard him gladly. As a whole Israel rejected their Messiah.

In the parable, the invited guests refused to come to the wedding supper, but instead killed the messengers. This parallels how Israel killed the prophets who were sent to her with God's message. Many times we read how God's prophets were rejected, persecuted, and killed, even up until John the Baptist who was the last of the old testament prophets.

As a result, the master of the wedding supper, the father of the Son, brought his wrath upon them. Also, this began a general invitation to bring in whoever heard the invitation. This reflects the gospel message going to all the world. The Lord Jesus told his disciples to preach the gospel in all the world and to every person after he ascended to heaven. This is what we see happening throughout the book of Acts and beyond.

However, just because a person heard the gospel and went to church does not make him a Christian. There was a man who came to the wedding but did not wear wedding clothes. This is someone who heard the word but did not receive the word into their life to the extent that it changed who they were. They knew about God, the Bible, and probably attended church, but none of this got into their heart or changed who they were. They had selfish interests in mingling among God's people. This man eventually was exposed by the Lord and put out of the fellowship of the true bride of Christ.

The enemies of the Lord Jesus asked him questions in an attempt to trap him. Their trap was to get him to side with Jews or the Romans but the Lord Jesus easily navigated their questions. He told them to give to Caesar what is Caesar's (the coin with Caesar's image on it), but unto God what was God's (man bears the image of God). In his response, no one could trap him and no one could say anything bad about the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus clearly showed believers that they were citizens of another place and our kingdom was not of this current world system. While we are here we submit to the governing authorities in place. This was also the same message the apostle Paul and the other apostles wrote in their letters. A good example is Romans chapter 13.

The Sadducees tried to trap the Lord Jesus with a question about marriage and resurrection. The irony here was that these men claimed not to believe in the resurrection or in angels. But the Lord Jesus, in his reply, proved the resurrection in a simple way by using scripture. Scripture calls Jehovah the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The scripture said this in the present tense which means that he is even now the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and therefore these men must be alive. God is not the God of the dead but of the living, therefore these men, even though they died, must be alive in the presence of God. This showed the importance of knowing even the verb tense of scriptures because sometimes a point can be made just by what tense a verb is used in scripture.

The Lord Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment and he easily replied, "Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself."

Scripture assumes you already love yourself. Men are lovers of their own selves and that is why we must be told to love our neighbor as we already love ourselves.

Now the Lord Jesus asked them a question. Why does David, speaking by the Holy Spirit, call his son "Lord"? The implication was not only was the Messiah the Son of David, but that he was also the Son of God. They could not or would not answer this question from the Lord Jesus and left him alone.

Chapter 23

After I read these denunciations against the religious leaders by the Lord Jesus I was inspired to examine my own heart. Do I have these characteristics in my life? Do I want to be seen by men? Do I desire prestige and position? Do I work in order to have a title and be considered "over" my fellow man? What is my goal in life? Do I desire to serve the Lord and my neighbor or do I want to be in control of my life and the lives of others around me?

The Lord Jesus had a list of denunciations and woes for these religious leaders.

He spoke to the people first and said these men sat in the seat of Moses but they did not help the people.

Instead, they actually put burdens on men. The Lord Jesus said they did not lift a finger to help the people upon whom they put these religious burdens.

This was in stark contrast to the Lord Jesus who invited everyone to come to him. The religious leaders put burdens upon people but the Lord Jesus told people that he would lift their burdens.

Matthew 11:28-29, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."*

The religious leaders put the burden of their wrong interpretation of the law on men, but the Lord Jesus instead invited people to himself. Notice the difference. Religious people have teachings, ideas, and principles; in contrast men filled with the Holy Spirit point to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus revealed the motive behind why these religious men performed their "good works". They performed good works so they would be seen by men. Since their hearts were set on position then their actions needed to be seen by those who could bestow prestige and praise upon them.

These men loved upper rooms and high seats. This is the pride of life, the lust for prestige, power, and position.

Most religious leaders are susceptible to the pride of life. They liked to be called "rabbi". This indicated their desire for titles which elevated them over their fellow man. We should not grasp after titles but instead insist people call us "brother" and not "reverend" or "doctor".

The Lord Jesus explicitly told us not to call men "father" which Catholics do all the time. This should be a clue of how far away from the truth the catholic church is.

The Lord Jesus taught us that whoever exalted himself would be abased and whoever humbled himself would be exalted.

I think humility is a lesson that is lacking in the modern church. Our society is built upon the pride of life and it infects everything from top to bottom.

The church has not escaped the influence of prestige, position, and power. It is seen in the way church buildings erect a platform for pastors to stand on over the rest of the congregation. It is seen in the way religious leaders receive titles, diplomas, or certificates which deceive them and others into thinking that they have more prestige and position than their brothers in Christ.

The Lord Jesus turned his attention now directly to the religious leaders and pronounced woe upon them.

These men prayed long prayers while they cheated widows and orphans. Since we can clearly see how much God emphasizes the widow and orphan throughout scripture it is terrifying to think how far gone these religious leaders were.

These men had serious problems. They focused on things which did not matter while neglecting issues of life which were very important. How often am I also guilty of missing the forest for the trees?

Notice here that toward the end of these woes the Lord Jesus referred to these men as a brood of vipers. This use of the word vipers puts them in the same category as the devil. John the Baptist also denounced these religious leaders as a brood of serpents.

Jerusalem symbolized the leaders of Israel and their rejection of Messiah Jesus. The Lord Jesus said their house was left desolate, and this took place in the years after the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven. In a few years the nation of Israel was scattered, this time by the Romans, and the city of Jerusalem burned down.

However, the Lord Jesus will come back. He said they would see him again one day and they would say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." I believe this points to the time when the Lord Jesus returns for Israel to rescue her at the end of the seven year tribulation period. At that time the Lord Jesus will set foot once again on the mount of Olives.

Chapter 24

They left the temple and the disciples pointed to the massive buildings. Perhaps they sensed the finality of what had just happened and were trying to distract the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus used the occasion

to describe the end of those buildings and the end of history. What the Lord Jesus said about the buildings unfolded in a few short years when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

Sometimes in prophetic scripture one verse leaps hundreds or thousands of years in time between verses. This can happen right in the middle of a verse where there is a comma.

This is the case in these scriptures describing what happened in AD 70 by the Romans and then goes all the way to the end of the church age.

One characteristic of the last days is rampant deception. There is no doubt in my mind that I live in a time of intense delusion and deception. Every time I read a newspaper I do so with the knowledge that everything I am reading is some form of propaganda and lie.

The Lord Jesus described signs of wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes in various places as the beginning of sorrows. He predicted widespread persecution of Christians. **1 Peter 4:12**, "*Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you*".

Also, the Lord prophesied many believers would be offended and their love for him would grow cold.

During these last days there is a groundswell of false prophets deceiving people. I see this right now with the rise of the prosperity gospel and false faith teaching in America. Also, there are many people attacking the doctrine of the rapture. All these are signs of false prophets and corrupt bible teaching.

In the middle of the seven year tribulation the abomination of desolation takes place. At this point the great tribulation begins, and events move rapidly in the last 3 1/2 years of the tribulation toward the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

A careful reading of Matthew chapter 24 shows there are two distinct appearances of the Lord Jesus. One is the rapture before the tribulation. The rapture appearance of the Lord Jesus is the one described when one person disappears and one is left. It is a secret appearance of the Lord Jesus when the church is taken out of the world. The other one is at the end of the tribulation when the Lord Jesus is seen by everyone. At the second return every eye on planet earth will see him returning in clouds of glory.

This second coming describes the return of the Lord Jesus at the end of the seven year tribulation period. This return is seen by everyone and is unmistakable.

The Lord Jesus draws a parallel between new growth on a fig tree and world events which indicate the fulfillment of prophecy. When these things are near it is like new leaves on a fig tree which indicates that summer is near. In a similar manner worldwide events which are described in this chapter indicate that the end of the age is near and the beginning of God's kingdom is at hand.

When the Lord Jesus describes no one knowing the day or the hour he is pointing us to his secret return to earth in which the church is snatched out of the world. This is commonly known as the rapture of the church. The original word in Greek is "harpazo", which means "snatching away". Every Christian with this hope purifies his life so he is ready for the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. We are exhorted to always be ready for the return of the Lord Jesus.

An evil servant is like unbelievers who complain that God is not bringing history to an end. This man says in his heart, "My lord delays his coming". He does not prepare himself for the return of the Lord. Instead, he lives whatever way he desires. This man is lazy and careless with his life and does not fear the Lord. The Lord Jesus says this man is separated from the true brethren ("cut asunder") and assigned a place with the hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This should strike the fear of God into the heart of every Christian.

Luke 21:36, *"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."*

Chapter 25

Here are two parables which describe our responsibility in light of the return of Jesus. We have a straightforward description of what the Lord will do when he returns. He judges the nations.

It is important to understand that everyone in this group are virgins but this group is then subdivided into two groups called "foolish" and "wise". It is important to keep in mind that this is not comparing two unlike groups but two groups within one larger category. Hopefully I can explain why I think this is important.

It is easy to think that the foolish virgins are false believers or unbelievers. I don't think that is accurate because the entire group is one category. We do not have a comparison here of people in completely opposite categories but people who are alike in everything except one crucial detail.

I don't believe foolish virgins are unbelievers or non-Christians. I believe all of these virgins represent the entire house of faith of professing believers. They all know about the return of Jesus.

In this parable the virgins are separated from one another by one simple fact. Those who are foolish do not bring enough oil with them to endure to the end when the bridegroom arrived.

I sincerely believe there must be a choice made by Christians every single day to wake up and put faith in Jesus Christ. I believe we need to confess Jesus Christ is our Lord every day and proclaim that we are united together with him in death, burial, and resurrection. I believe we must be filled with the Holy Spirit every day. I try to remember every day to ask God to fill me with the Holy Spirit and thank him for putting me in Christ Jesus and uniting me with him in death, burial, and resurrection.

I wonder how many Christians understand the importance of abiding in Christ this way every day. It is easy to move away from Jesus and believe in man-made religions, philosophies, and worldly faith systems. These take us away from simple faith in Jesus.

I think the foolish virgins represent Christians who rely on something other than the Holy Spirit. They do not make it to the end. They do not endure to the end.

I believe the only Christian who is eternally secure is the Christian who today believes in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. TODAY is the day of salvation! Don't forget this. Anyone who gets off this is in peril.

This is the saving gospel and power of God for salvation. If we get off this gospel we are not secure. Our only security is the Lord Jesus and not confessing a doctrine of eternal security. Our security is in a MAN, not a doctrine or system of faith. Some Christians should repent of putting faith in doctrine rather than in the living God revealed in the Lord Jesus.

The foolish and wise virgins belong to one house of faith. This was not comparing other religions and Christianity. This was Jesus contrasting two groups in the one house of faith.

It is frightening to consider these facts which is probably why I never have heard a sermon on this parable pinpointing this distinction. I never knew this distinction existed until the Lord showed me.

The Lord showed me there is a true remnant in the house of faith. This true remnant of believers are those filled with the Holy Spirit every day and overcome. They do not merely talk about the Bible and doctrines. They don't just talk about God. Instead, they are united with him every day. They truly die to self and lay down their will in obedience to God's word every day. These believers are prepared to humble their heart in order to experience the presence of the living God. They don't want anything fake or phony from religious people and churches. They want to hear the voice of the Lord and are willing to pay the price to know the Lord Jesus in spirit and in truth.

The Lord Jesus told us to count the cost. To follow him costs our life. We must lose our life for the Lord Jesus in order to find eternal life. That is the straight and narrow road men have such a hard time walking. Why is it hard? Mostly because of pride and unbelief.

Note the end result of the foolish virgins. How surprised they must be when they are shut out of the wedding feast. All along they thought they would be in this wedding and at the last minute they are shut out. Why? Because they were not ready. They were not ready because they were not filled with the Holy Spirit. It is as simple as that.

People may say "I know the Lord" but the real question is this: does the Lord know you?

I want Jesus to know me. I want him to call my name. I heard him call my name before and I desire with all my heart to hear him call my name again.

To hear his voice is the most wonderful experience a man can have this side of heaven.

Here we see a great danger was not just sins of commission but sins of omission. The Lord Jesus used a parable to describe judgment day for servants of a master. This was a reflection of how things will be one day. There will be judgment and separation.

I don't pretend to understand how this takes place but I believe Christians should cultivate right now a genuine fear of God and look forward to the day of the Lord's return.

Most grab a comforting doctrine to soothe their conscience so they are not concerned about future judgment. However, as with the parable of the ten virgins we need to take into consideration this parable describes one group of people: servants of a master who receive talents to employ. Two of these men did well with the talents given to them; one did not.

There was a discerning between groups based upon what they do or do not do in life within these parables.

Is salvation therefore based on works?

Let me say without any doubt our salvation rests solely upon God's grace and not upon our works.

Let me be quick to add someone who truly believes in the Lord Jesus shows it through his life. This is what the parable tells me. Someone who truly believes is about his Father's business just like the Lord Jesus.

Notice the warnings were directed toward the house of faith and professing believers. The next section, however, turned towards dividing unbelieving nations from those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus gave a clear description of judgment day which befell the nations of the world. I believe this judgment took place at the end of the seven year tribulation and right at the beginning of the thousand year reign of Christ over the earth.

The basis of this judgment was related to how nations treat Christ's brethren. Who are these brethren? It is my opinion these brethren refer to Israel. Therefore this judgment is about how nations treat Israel.

It is very serious how the United States takes a hard stand against Israel. I would not want to be in the shoes of a president who turns this nation against Israel. He is inviting wrath from God upon himself and this nation.

Chapter 26

The Lord Jesus finished his teaching. This was the end of his teaching ministry and the beginning of his redemption ministry.

"Ye know" the Lord Jesus said to them. The Lord Jesus told them on several occasions what would happen to him. Their minds, however, were filled with their own assumptions and they could not hear what he plainly told them.

It is amazing that the Lord Jesus told his disciples he would be betrayed into the hands of those who wanted to kill him. He assured them he would die but he would rise again and meet them in Galilee. None of them understood what the Lord Jesus said so clearly.

How often do we think we understand what the Lord is doing? How often do we think we understand what is happening? I often say if the Lord Jesus appeared to me and gave me simple instructions I would still mess up. Apparently, I'm the same kind of man these disciples were. They did not

understand what the Lord Jesus said. My prayer is that I might grow each day in grace and hear God's word and obey it as these men learned to do.

As soon as the Lord Jesus predicted what would happen we see that his enemies gathered together and plotted how to kill him.

The Lord Jesus predicted his death. A woman came to him at the house of Simon the leper and broke an expensive jar of perfume and anointed him. The disciples were upset with the woman and thought this act of worship was a waste. In other gospels the disciple who protested was Judas who betrayed the Lord Jesus. Judas kept the money bag and was a thief the scriptures tell us. He probably wanted the money for himself, even though he spoke about the "poor". Also, it is interesting that the Lord Jesus said what this woman did would always be remembered and included wherever the gospel was preached. Of course, this is true, because we see this included in the gospels and it is often preached on as well.

I wonder if she knew why she poured this perfume on the Lord Jesus? In my opinion she was motivated by love for the Lord Jesus but the Lord stated that what she did was in preparation for his burial.

Immediately after the disciples were rebuked we see the next move Judas made was to betray the Lord Jesus. Perhaps all this talk of dying and burial was the final straw in his mind. Perhaps he thought the Lord had lost his mind. Whatever the motivations it is apparent he cast away any faith he had in the Lord Jesus. He cast in his lot with the enemies of God though he later regretted this.

Judas went to the chief priests and sold himself as a betrayer. He sold himself and the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. From that time Judas looked for an opportunity to betray the Lord Jesus. He did not have to wait long.

When I read these scriptures about Judas betraying the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver I want to search my own heart and ask the question: what would I betray the Lord Jesus for? Would it be money? Would it be love of comfort or pleasure more than God? Would it be because I cannot endure being in a furnace of suffering and so cast away my faith that the Lord is still with me? What would it take for me to throw away my faith in the Lord Jesus and turn my back on him?

I think it is important to ask these questions and not be confident in myself or assume I would never betray the Lord. I am the same as these men. I am no different than Peter or any of the men who ran away.

The Lord Jesus had friends who were not mentioned by name. They reserved an upper room for him. The disciples were instructed where to go and speak to a man. They prepared everything for the Passover. The disciples were participants in preparations but everything was done ahead of time.

A topic at this meal was the Lord's betrayer. It was as if the Lord needed to get this off his heart first. Notice the reaction of the disciples. Each one examined his own heart instead of pointing fingers at others in the room. Each one wondered, "Is it I?"

This is a good question to ask myself on a regular basis. A good prayer is to ask the Lord to put his finger on anything in my heart, character, life, or attitude which might cause me to betray or deny him. I want to be wholehearted in my appraisal of myself. I know I am weak as water. Only by God's grace can I stand with the Lord through the trials in life.

A transformation happened from the Passover to the new way of observing the Lord's supper. This transformation took place because the Lord Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Every lamb Israel sacrificed looked forward to when the Lord Jesus died on the cross for the sins of all mankind. The Lord Jesus was the Lamb of God. John the Baptist proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

The Lord Jesus said that the wine is a symbol of his blood of the new testament and the bread symbolized his body given for us. The Lord Jesus invites us to eat and to drink of this bread of life and this living water which is Himself. He doesn't give us abstract principles or ideas to live by. Instead, the Lord Jesus gives Himself. He is the bread. He is the wine. He is everything we need for life, godliness, and for eternal life. The Lord Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through him. (**John 14:6**) There is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved. (**Acts 4:12**)

The Lord Jesus told them they would be offended and he would be left alone. He said he would die but rise again. He told them he would see them again in Galilee. He told them he would rise again and meet them in Galilee.

Peter expressed his opinion that he was better than the others. He said he would never leave the Lord and would die with him.

We should humble our heart and rely on God's grace to deliver us from temptation. We can do nothing in our own strength.

The Lord Jesus replied to Peter and told him exactly what he would do. He told Peter how many times he would deny the Lord Jesus and that he would do this before the rooster crowed in the morning.

This must have shocked Peter but though the Lord Jesus told him this it still did not prevent Peter from doing exactly what the Lord Jesus predicted.

This account should make us tremble and examine our own lives. Are we so strong? Are we so confident? Peter demonstrated the difference between self-confidence and the reality of failure in temptation. He was a good example and with the help of the Lord we should search our heart. Let us humble ourselves and admit that if not for the grace of God we would do the same thing Peter did. We are no different. We are no better than Peter or any of these disciples who stumbled that night.

At the Garden of Gethsemane the Lord Jesus sought his Father before he was betrayed into the hands of sinners. The Lord Jesus set aside Peter, James, and John to accompany him. Yet even these three chosen disciples went to sleep. They were unable to keep their eyes open even this close to the end. They slept even as the enemy approached.

I think there are parallels in this account and what happens with the church in the last days before the return of the Lord Jesus. There is again this deep, supernatural sleep upon the church. Everyone seems oblivious and blind to an enemy who approaches to kill, steal, and destroy.

When I read this verse "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" I am reminded that there is no other way for men to be saved. If there was any other way for men to be saved surely God would have allowed it rather than see his only begotten Son crucified. This passage reminds me of how heinous it is when people say there is some other way to God than through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus encouraged his disciples to watch and pray so they would not enter temptation. He said the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Even here in his darkest hour the Lord Jesus was concerned about his disciples. He thought about their welfare and tried to help them while his own life was in peril.

Always remember that it was not unbelievers who betrayed Christ.

It was a man who spent three years in ministry with the Lord Jesus who betrayed him. It was a man who took part in feeding the multitudes with miraculous bread. It was a man who saw the Lord Jesus walk on water. It was a man who witnessed the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, and the lame walking. It was this man, Judas, who betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss.

Notice the Lord Jesus went willingly. He did not resist this arrest but committed himself into the hands of his Father. This was to fulfill prophecy as Matthew pointed out.

What was the crime the Sanhedrin charged the Lord Jesus with? It was the crime of being who he was. He was Christ and He is forever the Christ, the Messiah. He told them he would be seated at the right hand of glory and return in clouds of heaven. After his statement they accused him of blasphemy and condemned him. It is interesting that their conviction of the Lord Jesus as the Christ is a testimony against themselves. In my opinion, I think this was what the Lord Jesus meant when he said to them "Thou hast said". Out of their own mouths they confessed him as Messiah and then rejected him.

They thought they judged the Lord Jesus but it was the Lord Jesus who judged them. He is the final judge of the universe and every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess the Lord Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2)

Just as the Lord Jesus predicted Peter denied the Lord three times before the rooster crowed. In the end Peter remembered the word of the Lord and cried bitterly for his sin.

Chapter 27

They tried the Lord Jesus at night and then waited until morning. The motive was unclear why they waited until morning but it was clear that the chief priests and elders had decided to put Jesus to death. There wasn't enough room in the world for them and the Lord Jesus.

Why did they need Pilate? The religious leaders did not have a legal right to put someone to death so they needed the Romans to kill Jesus.

When Judas saw the result of his betrayal he felt remorse. Evidently this was not a remorse in the sense that he repented because the next thing he did was hang himself. He also returned the blood money which the religious leaders then used to buy a cemetery.

Judas saw Jesus condemned. Whatever reason Judas had for his betrayal failed and Judas felt remorse. He did not repent in the same sense that Peter repented. Judas felt a remorse which led him to suicide. The religious leaders were no comfort to his tormented soul.

Pilate was amazed at the response the Lord Jesus made to his accusers, which was to remain silent. It took divine strength to remain silent when people accused him and threatened his life. How difficult it would be for me not to defend myself. It was very hard to do. It was hard to stay silent and allow people to walk over him. I have failed many times in keeping my mouth shut but the Lord Jesus succeeded. Pilate was amazed at him and how he continued steadfastly to submit throughout this fake trial.

What they thought was weakness was really the strength of the Lord Jesus. He answered nothing.

Pilate was struck by the behavior of Jesus. No doubt the innocence of Jesus stood out in stark contrast to the criminals he had judged previously.

Pilate did not want anything to do with the Lord Jesus or with his accusers but he was stuck. He tried to escape a decision by offering the accusers a choice between Barabbas, a murderer, and Jesus. The people chose Barabbas over Jesus.

This was a foreshadowing of how people will choose the Antichrist over the Lord Jesus.

The people demanded that Jesus be crucified and his blood be upon them.

Crucifixion was abhorrent to these people. It was amazing that they not only asked for Barabbas but also demanded the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. The chief priests persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas but something else moved in that crowd when they cried "Let him be crucified".

Pilate washed his hands in water in an attempt to remove his guilt. This could not remove his sin. Pilate was guilty, too. They were all guilty.

In the same way that the Lord Jesus took the place of Barabbas he also takes our place.

The Lord Jesus suffered at the hands of the religious leaders and now suffered at the hands of the Romans.

Pilate handed the Lord Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified. The soldiers mocked Jesus by putting a robe on him and a crown of thorns on his head. They put a rod in his hand and bowed to him and said, "Hail king of the Jews". They spit on him and hit him with the rod then they lead him out to crucify him.

One remarkable fact about the scene of the Lord's crucifixion was the statements people made about him when they mocked him. They clearly testified that it was common knowledge that the Lord Jesus said he was the Son of God. This was a question we need to ask ourselves today, just as others have pointed out: either he is the Son of God or he is not.

When Jesus hung on the cross the soldiers cast lots for his clothes which was a fulfillment of prophecy.

The accusation set over his head: "*This Is Jesus The King Of The Jews*".

They did not understand why the Lord Jesus came. He did not come to save himself but came instead to save us.

Darkness covered the land and there was an earthquake. The Roman centurion standing there believed and declared, "Truly this was the Son of God".

Joseph of Arimathea received permission from Pilate to remove the body of Jesus from the cross and bury him. Joseph buried Jesus in his own tomb.

It is significant this was a new tomb. There was no other body in the tomb. When the Lord Jesus resurrected there was no mistake who it was that came out of the grave.

The enemies of the Lord knew he said he would rise again the third day. It is interesting they were more alarmed about this than the disciples. As a result they petitioned to have Roman guards seal and guard the tomb until the third day.

This Roman seal and guard ensured it was impossible that the disciples of the Lord Jesus could steal his body. In this way the religious leaders and Romans help solidify the facts surrounding the resurrection of Jesus and provided further proof he was risen indeed.

Chapter 28

Love inspired the women to travel to the place where their Lord was buried.

I have often reflected on the fact that these women knew this tomb was sealed and guarded by Romans. They knew Joseph closed the tomb when Jesus was laid to rest. Knowing all this what did they think they were doing at the tomb? In other gospels we read that the women prepared spices to anoint his body but how did they intend to get inside the tomb to him? I don't think they considered any of this. In my opinion they were motivated by love in their heart and did not think logically about any of this.

The soldiers were terrified at the sight of angels. There was an earthquake and angels appeared in order to remove the seal and the rock blocking the entrance to the tomb. These angels were there to help the women who arrived at the tomb.

Not only do we have the word of angels but these women also saw that the Lord Jesus was no longer in the tomb. The angels told the women that the Lord Jesus was risen and went ahead of the disciples to Galilee and would meet them there.

As these women rushed back to tell the disciples the good news the Lord Jesus himself met them.

The Lord Jesus greeted them with joy. Notice that the women worshiped the Lord Jesus. He is God. The Lord Jesus is God.

The Roman soldiers who guarded the Lord's tomb went to the religious leaders and reported what happened. Even then, after hearing the report, they were only interested in suppressing the truth about the Lord Jesus.

This was a cover up. The soldiers obviously were confused to seek out the religious leaders instead of reporting to their supervisors. They knew their leaders would execute them for failure in their mission.

"Teach all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This was the command to make disciples not converts. It is a call to invest our lives in the lives of others in order to share all the Lord Jesus gave us.

Mike Kines

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